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5 Cents.

PLUCK AND LUCK

DAN AND HIS DOUBLE
OR THE CHURCH UNDER THE RIVER
AND OTHER STORIES

By Allan Arnold



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PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure

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NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 19, 1913.

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Dan and His Double

—OR—

THE CHURCH UNDER THE RIVER

By ALLAN ARNOLD

CHAPTER I.

THE FATE OF THE TWILIGHT.

"Hey, you, Dan! Hey! Say! Are ye thar?"

Mr. Hezekiah Handy stood by the boat and shouted.

"Hey, Dan! Hey you, Dan! Satan seize the little runt! Dan! Hello!"

"Hello!" came the answer out of the swamp.

"At last!" growled Mr. Handy. "Why ther mischief don't yer come on?"

"I'm coming!"

"So's Christmas. Hev yer lost ther hawg?"

"No, I've got the hog all right."

"Then come on with him. We'll be caught in the dark ef yer don't take care."

"But the hog's heavy. I'm coming as fast as I can."

"Wall, I'm er goin' to start acrost. You kin pull to ther boat with one hawg, I reckon. I want ter get home."

Then Mr. Handy, who was reckoned the meanest man in Plaquemine Parish, got into an old boat which contained the dead carcass of a long, slab-sided wild hog and started to pull across the Mississippi River, leaving the invisible Dan to follow with the other "hawg."

Now all this happened late one December afternoon on the banks of the lower Mississippi, a few miles from the town of Romer, which stands on the edge of the great swamps of Southern Louisiana, some forty miles below the city of New Orleans.

In the eyes of some, Hezekiah Handy was what is known in the South as a "mudsill," a man too poor to own a plantation and too lazy to work one if he had it, who picks his living up along the river the best way he can.

Mr. Handy was worse than a mudsill, for some mudsills are honest and liberal in their way, and he was neither.

Then again he could hardly have been termed a mudsill, because he was known to own many buildings in Romer, of which he collected the rent, living himself in a dirty swamp alone with Dan Dean, a bright boy of some eighteen years, who had been with him since his earliest childhood.

Just who Dan was or what relation he bore to Miser Handy, as his neighbors always called the old man, nobody knew nor did Dan know himself.

In fact, the boy knew little or nothing, except what he had taught himself by reading.

One thing about Mr. Handy to be said in his favor was that he usually treated Dan with such kindness as he was capable of. He taught him to read and had provided him with quite a little library, which was certainly a strange thing for such a man to do.

Thus Dan's life was not altogether an uncomfortable one, but he knew absolutely nothing of the outside world.

Hog hunting in the swamp is a favorite sport in Southern Louisiana, and as all the fresh meat Miser Handy ever put on his table was obtained in this way, he and Dan often found occasion to indulge in it.

They had been across the river on a hog hunt on this particular afternoon, which was destined to become ever memorable in Dan Dean's history, for on that day began a train of strange adventures which in the end changed the whole current of the boy's life.

But we anticipate.

Leaving our hero still invisible in the swamp, we must follow Miser Handy, who began pulling his boat across the river, well knowing that Dan could be trusted to follow with the other "hawg."

The first thing Miser Handy saw when he got well out into the turbid current of the Mississippi was a small steamer in the distance making her way up stream.

"Wonder what boat that is?" he thought. Then he looked back to see if Dan had started.

There was a low, swampy island directly on his left and a boat was just pushing out from among the bushes pulled by a ragged boy.

"Lorzee! Why, that ar's Dan!" gasped Mr. Handy. "Dan! Dan! How in tarnation did ye git thar?"

The boy in the boat heard the shout and gave one quick look around.

Was it Dan?

Miser Handy didn't feel so sure then.

Immediately the boy whipped the boat around and drove her in among the bushes, disappearing instantly.

Looking back, Miser Handy then saw Dan just putting off from the shore.

"Wall, I swan! Something must all my eyes," muttered

the miser. "Thought that ar was Dan, but it couldn't er ben. Wonder who it was?"

But Miser Handy was not of a very curious disposition.

There were a few neighbors scattered along on both sides of the river, and as the old hog hunter kept much to himself, he did not pretend to know them all, so he just pulled on across the river with his hog.

Meanwhile, the steamboat came on up stream.

It was loaded with passengers taken from an ocean steamer stuck on the bar below.

This is a common occurrence at the mouth of the Mississippi, and the "Twilight," as the steamer was called, often took off passengers anxious to hasten their arrival at New Orleans.

Dan came on, too, with his hog.

He was watching the Twilight, which was pretty close to the island. There was another and smaller boat behind her—a mere tug—and Dan thought it must be the Hercules, a tug-boat belonging at Romer.

"Gracious! I wish I could go up to Orleans on the Twilight just once," muttered Dan. "I'm tired of this kind of life. If I had a cent to my name I'd run away."

But money was something Dan knew nothing about. There was no chance to earn any down there in the swamp and any that Mr. Handy might have he took precious good care to keep out of sight.

Dan pulled on, still watching the steamer. The cabin was ablaze with light, for it was now getting toward dusk, and the boat presented a fine sight to Dan's inexperienced eyes.

In fact, he thought the Twilight one of the trimmest little craft afloat on the river, so when she suddenly stopped right abreast the island, and he could see the passengers and crew running around excitedly, Dan felt curious to know what the matter was.

He changed his course and pulled toward her.

The excitement on board increased.

"There's something wrong!" thought Dan, forgetting all about the "hawg" and the blessing he was sure to get from Mr. Handy if he did not make haste home.

As he drew nearer the steamer he saw a well dressed young man come hurriedly forward and say something to the officer at the bow.

"Hello! Boat ahoy! Hello the boat!" shouted the officer, making a speaking-trumpet of his hands.

"Can you put this gent on board the Hercules?" came the call. "It's twenty-five dollars in your pocket if you will?"

"Twenty-five dollars!"

In Dan's eyes this was a fortune.

"The hog can go to thunder. I'm going for that money and when I get it I'm going to run away!" he instantly resolved.

"I'll do it, cap!" he called out.

"All right," replied the officer. "Come alongside and one of the deck hands will throw you a line!"

"What's the matter?" shouted Dan.

"Don't know. Something wrong in the engine room," was the reply. "We are liable to be stuck here for an hour or two, and this gent is in a hurry to get to Romer."

"Well, I'll take him off," replied Dan, and he pulled up alongside the Twilight, full of enthusiasm over his unexpected job.

Meanwhile, the gentleman had gone below, and when Dan next saw him he was standing in the lower gangway with a small black trunk by his side, talking to a young girl who Dan instantly decided was extremely beautiful, but then it must be remembered that Dan's experience with pretty girls was very slight.

"It's impossible to take you with me, Miss Nettie," he was saying. "You see what the boat is, and there's that dead hog in it. There's barely room for me and the trunk."

"As thought I would go with you now, Mr. Fullham!" cried the girl, drawing herself up proudly. "No, sir! Don't distress yourself. If my father had not put me in your charge—which I want you to understand was entirely against my wishes—I would not have come forward to say good-by."

"Don't put it that way, Miss Nettie. I hope you don't think I mean to desert you. I was on the point of looking you up to explain."

"No explanation is necessary, Mr. Fullham. Don't let me detain you, sir."

"But let me explain. This trunk contains——"

"I do not care what it contains!" broke in the girl, turning away. "Good-day, Mr. Fullham. Hereafter we are strangers."

With these words she passed out of sight.

"Come, boss, if you are going!" cried one of the colored deck hands. "De boy is hyar a-waitin'."

"Can you put me on board the Hercules, young man?" demanded Mr. Fullham, looking down at Dan.

"Yes, I can if you will come aboard," responded Dan. "It's mighty hard work holding the boat in here against the stream."

Mr. Fullham looked very much annoyed. He bit his lips, made one or two false starts, as though he was going to follow the girl, and then ordered the trunk lowered into the boat.

The colored deck hands flew around and let the trunk down. Dan received it and stowed it carefully forward on top of the hog.

It seemed to be pretty heavy and forced the bow of the boat well down into the water, but matters were evened up when Mr. Fullham dropped upon the stern seat. Dan let go of the rope, seized the oars and pulled away.

"Can't we throw off that hog?" demanded Mr. Fullham, crossly. "My trunk stands so high that the least lurch of the boat is liable to throw it overboard."

"I can't very well do that, sir," replied Dan. "The old man would go for me if I did."

"Your father?"

"He's not my father. He's Mr. Handy."

"What Handy? Do you mean Hezekiah Handy, of Plaquemine Parish?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're his boy?"

"I live with him."

"Humph. I know Mr. Handy. Mind how you go around the bows there or the current will carry you against the steamer. Merciful heaven! What now?"

Suddenly a thunderous report rang out upon the stillness of the lonely swamp and a bright tongue of flame shot up from the Twilight amidships.

"The boiler's busted!" cried Dan. "Look! Look!"

The steamer seemed to rise in two sections in the middle, instantly settling down again and sinking at the bows, while the air fairly rang with piercing screams, mingled with the loud hissing of steam.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WITH THE TRUNK.

An explosion it certainly was, and a very serious one.

Inside of a few minutes the Twilight had sunk in the Mississippi and the river was strewn with wreckage and alive with passengers struggling for their lives.

"Pull away! Pull away! Put me ashore anywhere!" cried Mr. Fullham. "Don't let any of them get aboard this boat!"

At the instant of the occurrence of the accident Dan had seen a small boat, much like his own, pulling out from the

Island, which was close at hand, and the first thing that attracted his attention was a huge piece of the boiler which flew from the wreck, struck this boat, shivering it to pieces and sending the boy who pulled it into the river.

The next thing he saw was the face of the young girl who had spoken with Mr. Fullham on board the steamer struggling in the water close beside them.

Instantly the incident of the other boat was forgotten.

Dan could see nothing but the pleading face of the girl, hear nothing but her cry for help.

"Let her go! Let her go! It will swamp us if we try to pull her aboard!" Fullham shouted.

"You coward!" cried Dan. "If I have to pitch you out I'll take her in!" and he started to turn the boat toward the drowning girl.

"No you don't!" shouted Fullham, springing up and trying to seize the oars.

Dan was furious. If he stopped to fight that ended the girl's chances.

Looking off on the water he saw her sink.

"Take that!" he shouted, striking at Fullham with the right oar—the left had gone overboard in the struggle.

The oar came down upon Mr. Fullham's head with a force which broke the crown of his new derby and tumbled him over half senseless in the stern of the boat.

Dropping the oar then, Dan plunged headlong into the water and struck out boldly toward the place where the drowning girl had disappeared.

By this time it was dark, and, as may be supposed, the greatest confusion reigned at the scene of the wreck.

We do not propose to enlarge upon the stirring scene.

Many lives were sacrificed that night through the carelessness of a drunken engineer.

All we are concerned with is Dan Dean, the girl Nettie and the man with the trunk.

Dan caught the girl as she rose for the second time.

He was a splendid swimmer and had saved more than one life in his time; he knew just how to handle himself to keep the girl from dragging him under.

"Courage, miss!" he cried. "Don't throw your arms about me. Let me support you so. There! Grab that settee. It will hold us both up. Never mind. You have missed it. Just stay as you are and I can easily get you to that island. We are sure to be picked up by the Hercules. Don't be scared."

Dan rattled on and swam on. He was trying to keep the girl from fainting by talking, but he did not succeed.

In a moment her head, with its wealth of golden hair, fell over upon Dan's shoulder, and the boy knew that he had a dead weight to carry.

He bore his burden bravely, using his disengaged arm and his legs for all they were worth, every moment bringing him nearer to the wooded shore of one of the numerous low islands which are to be found everywhere in this part of the river.

He never doubted that he would reach it, but he had grave doubts whether or not the girl was still alive.

Meanwhile, Mr. Fullham had experienced a surprise.

He thought as he tumbled back in the boat that he saw Dan go overboard; when he recovered his wits an instant later there was the boy just climbing into the boat at the bow.

"Look out! Confound you, look out! You'll swamp us! You'll lose the trunk!" he yelled.

"No, I won't lose the trunk, either," replied the boy, tossing a pair of oars into the boat. "I s'pose you want to get ashore, don't you? Well, I'm here to do the job."

The dudish Mr. Fullham was as big a coward as could be found in the entire State of Louisiana.

He had been through one experience with Dan, and he did

not care for another, so he concluded that the best thing for him to do was to speak the boy fair.

"So you gave it up, did you?" he asked.

"Yes, I gave it up," was the brief reply.

"Did—the girl drown?"

"What girl?"

"What girl! Why, the girl you—good gracious! Put it down! Don't shoot! Wha-wha-what do you mean?"

Suddenly shipping one oar the boy pulled out a revolver and pointed it at Mr. Fullham's head.

"Hold your tongue!" he hissed. "I'm bossing this job. You've got nothing to do but to sit still!"

Mr. Fullham was overcome with fear.

"For heaven's sake spare my life!" he groaned. "Put me on board of the Hercules, and I'll give you a hundred dollars instead of twenty-five."

"Shut up!" cried the boy. "You're going with me—understand. There, I've put up the gun, but it will come out again if you make any talk and it will be used, too!"

He pocketed the pistol, picked up the oar and pulled vigorously toward the islands, carefully avoiding the wreckage and paying not the least attention to the many cries for help all around him.

To say that Mr. Fullham was frightened but half tells the story.

He stared at his companion with eyes half dropping out of his head.

It certainly appeared to be the same boy.

He was clothed simply in shirt and trousers, which clung to him, all wet and dripping.

The only difference was that he had lost his hat, which was easily accounted for by his plunge into the river.

Yes, Mr. Fullham was frightened, and he had good reason to be, for the trunk was full of greenbacks, money sent down from New York to the Romer Bank, of which he was cashier.

"They are on to me," he thought. "I'm in the hands of the river gang sure. Oh, I wish I could swim! I'd let the money go to thunder if I only could!"

There had been desperate doings in and around Plaquemine Parish of late.

Many unwary travelers had been waylaid and robbed; cotton boats carrying cargoes to ships lower down the river had been wrecked, the hands murdered and the precious bales stolen.

The Romer Bank had been robbed in the night a few months before, the safe being broken open and a large sum of money stolen.

It was to make good this loss that Mr. Fullham was sent North to negotiate a loan. It was because the directors wished to keep the extent of their loss a secret that he personally brought back the money, instead of having it sent down by express in the usual way.

All these doings were laid to the door of the river gang, a notorious band of thieves and cut-throats for whose secret hiding-place the sheriff of Plaquemine Parish had for a long time been searching in vain.

And in view of all this we say again—it was no wonder Mr. Fullham was frightened.

The fact of the matter was, he was scared half out of his wits.

"Where are you taking me to?" he demanded of this terrible boy with the revolver. "I want to go aboard the Hercules. I don't want to go ashore on this island. I'll give you five hundred dollars—a thousand—oh, my! Put it down! Put it down!"

The boy had shipped his oar again and whipped out the revolver.

"If you don't hold your jaw I'll shoot you!" he said, in a voice so fierce that it threw Mr. Fullham into a tremble.

The boat shot in among the bushes at the edge of an island and a moment later touched the shore.

"Get out and stand still!" ordered the boy, at the same time uttering a peculiar cry.

The cry was heard by another beside Mr. Fullham, who at that moment was peering at the newcomers through the bushes quite as much startled as the cashier himself.

It was Dan.

He was staring at his double.

In face, form, clothes, in every particular the boy who now dragged the boat up upon the shore was the living counterpart of himself, and yet so far as Dan was aware, he had not a relative in the world.

Dan's double had turned his back upon the Romer banker, and was giving his whole attention to the boat.

No fear that his victim might turn on him troubled the boy, for at the same instant six men wearing black silk bands drawn tightly over the lower part of their faces sprang out from the swamp and covered Mr. Fullham with as many revolvers.

"We want your trunk, but we don't want you!" hissed one. "If you hold your jaw we propose to let you live!"

CHAPTER III.

DOUBLING ON THE SHERIFF.

If there ever was an astonished boy in Plaquemine Parish then it was Dan.

What he might have said or done under other circumstances it is impossible to tell, but his situation was peculiar just then, for there at his feet lay the unconscious girl, Nettie, whom he had just drawn from the water a few moments before the arrival of the boat.

To make his presence known would be to turn the attention of the masked men his way and Dan did not want that.

So he crouched in the bushes, watched and listened, listening among other things to the grinding of the propeller of a tug which was rapidly approaching the island.

It was not the Hercules—that was busy at life-saving, but another which had suddenly made its appearance among the bayous, as the numerous small channels of the swamp which runs back from the Gulf of Mexico are termed.

On board this tug was the sheriff of Plaquemine Parish and a posse of twenty men.

Dan, still watching, saw Mr. Fullham seized and tied to a tree. He saw the trunk seized and dragged back into the cane-brake. He saw his double follow the masked men and then, as they disappeared, he saw the girl suddenly spring up when he thought her still in the same dead faint.

"Oh! Oh!" she cried. "Where am I? What has happened to me? Oh, my head is whirling. Ah! It is you! I remember you now! Thank you! Thank you a thousand times for saving my life!"

It was a case of hysterics. She laughed and cried and clung to Dan, who was in deadly terror for fear the noise would bring the masked men back.

"Help! Help! Save me!" shouted Mr. Fullham. "Who is it in the brake? Help me! I'm being murdered. Oh! It's you again! Don't kill me! Don't shoot me! I'll keep still!"

But it was only Dan who burst out upon him.

He was followed closely by Nettie.

Fullham's cries seemed to have restored the girl to herself.

"Look! Look!" she exclaimed. "There he is! It is Julius Fullham! Oh, what is the meaning of this?"

"Ask him. He did it," replied the cashier, sullenly, at the same time pointing to Dan.

"Nonsense! I didn't do it!" cried Dan, whipping out his knife and cutting the coward free.

At the same instant the tug touched the shore, and all heard the noise made by the sheriff's posse as they scrambled out.

"Help, murder, thieves! Save me!" bawled Fullham, jumping about like a madman.

There was a flash of pine knot torches and the sheriff's men came crashing through the canebrake.

"What do you mean by accusing me?" cried Dan, fiercely. "I tell you I'm not the boy!"

Fullham, plucking up courage at the sight of the sheriff, who came out of the canebrake, followed closely by three men, all holding flaring pine torches, made a rush at Dan and tried to seize him.

"Get back!" shouted Dan, dealing him a stunning blow between the eyes, while Nettie threw up her hands and screamed.

"Hold on there, you young cub!" cried the sheriff.

He made a rush for Dan, who ducked and dodged him, running off into the canebrake.

Bang! Bang!

Two shots came whirling after him and once more he heard the sheriff's voice calling to him to stop.

But Dan was not stopping.

He didn't care to meet the sheriff.

People said that old Hezekiah Handy knew more than he cared to tell about moonshine whisky and perhaps Dan did, too.

Dan was as good a runner as he was a swimmer, but among the sheriff's posse there were good runners, too, who knew how to "hook it" through the canebrake just as well as he did.

The chances were altogether in favor of the boy's capture just then.

But Dan jumped and dodged, went down into the mud and jumped over narrow water courses, urged on by the shouts of his pursuers, until all at once he struck into a small clearing where stood an old ruined hut facing the bayou on the other side of the island.

"Perhaps I can hide in there," thought Dan, making a quick dive in through the open back door.

He had no sooner done so than he regretted it.

A boy sprang upon him and caught him by the throat, and, holding him off at arm's length, stared at him in amazement by the light of a greasy lamp which stood on a table near by.

"Who are you?"

Dan and his double had met face to face.

It is an open question which was the more astonished.

"Who are you?" demanded the double again, at the same time letting go his hold.

He sprang to the door, closed it and shot the bolt.

"Who are you?" he repeated a third time, coming close up to Dan; "by thunder, if we were twin brothers we couldn't look more alike!"

"I'm only Dan Dean!" gasped our hero, thoroughly frightened. "Let me out, will you? They are after me. Don't you hear?"

"Who is it?"

"The sheriff!"

"What! What!"

"I say the sheriff. I'm to be arrested for what you did back there in the canebrake.

Dan's double burst into a loud laugh.

"No, you're not. We'll fool 'em!" he cried. "Say, I've seen you before, but I never knew who you were. Strange how much we look alike, isn't it? We'll talk about it some other

time. Here they come! Now, do just as I say. See that window there?"

"Yes."

"Can you swim?"

"You bet."

"Good enough! Jump out the window and tumble into the bayou. I'll lead 'em the other way."

There was no choice but to obey, for Dan could see nothing but capture ahead of him if he did anything else.

There were two windows to the hut, opening on opposite sides.

As Dan sprang out through one, his double threw up the other and followed his example.

"There he goes! There he goes!" yelled one of the men who had caught sight of Dan.

"You're crazy! There he goes!" cried others.

Only one man saw Dan. All the rest saw his double, who went bounding across the clearing, running toward the canebrake like a deer.

"Fire!" shouted the sheriff.

At the same instant Dan plunged headlong into the bayou.

As his head went under the water he heard the shots.

"We've got him!" the sheriff shouted. "I saw him go down."

Possibly they had seen Dan's double, but certainly not Dan, who was now deep down in the bayou swimming under water for all he was worth.

CHAPTER IV.

DAN'S REMARKABLE DIVE.

There was not a boy anywhere about the bayous of the lower Mississippi who could swim and dive any better than Dan Dean.

His whole life had been spent here among the swamps and on the river, he was in the water half his time, and to dodge the sheriff was comparatively an easy task.

Still Dan was decidedly uneasy. Uneasy about the girl whose life he felt he was to a certain extent responsible for; uneasy about the "hawg," which might be seized by some of the sheriff's party, and that meant a lively time with old Miser Handy when he got home.

But the one thing which bothered Dan more than all else, perhaps, was the thought of his mysterious double.

Who was the boy who so strangely resembled him?

While Dan was puzzling his brains about all these things he rose to the surface of the bayou.

"There he is! There he is! Shoot him!" bawled one of the sheriff's men from the shore, and two rifle shots came whizzing his way.

It was rather barbarous, perhaps, to fire at a mere boy, but they make short work of criminals down among the Louisiana bayous.

Dan had run against the sheriff, and the sheriff meant business.

To remain on the surface of the water was to be killed, so Dan gave one spring upward and dived again.

This was his great trick. He knew how to take deep dives, to force himself far under the water, and this was what he did now.

His scheme was to come up among the canebrake, where the sheriff's men could not get sight of him.

He went deeper down than he thought for, and this dive proved to be the beginning of a most singular experience.

Suddenly the boy's head struck against something hard, half **stunning him.**

It was lucky that he had presence of mind or Dan would have seen his finish then.

He held his breath and pulled himself together. Naturally he put out his hands to see what he had struck and then came a most remarkable discovery, which a boy with any less skill in diving and any less presence of mind never could have made.

His hands grasped what at first he thought was a wooden bar.

Puzzled and curious, he felt along and in a moment had, with hands and feet, traced the distinct outlines of a tall cross planted upon the top of something very like a church steeple.

Amazed and perplexed, Dan worked himself down lower still.

It certainly was a church steeple. He could feel the shingles and the metal casing on the ridges.

He pulled himself down further—further still.

The steeple, if it was a steeple, grew wider and wider.

Having remained under water as long as he dared now, Dan let himself come up to the surface.

He rose nearer to the shore than he expected.

He was at the entrance to a little cave, where the shore ran around at the edge of the canebrake to the hut, and he sank down all breathless and too tired to think.

"What in the world can that be?" he muttered. "A church steeple under the river? It seems just impossible and yet—by gracious, I'll know if it is really so!"

He looked over toward the hut.

There was a light burning in the window, but the sheriff and his posse were nowhere to be seen.

They were to be heard, though. Loud shouts reached the boy's ear and he could hear the deep baying of a bloodhound and men crashing through the canebrake.

Dan listened until he was certain that they were not coming his way and then he quietly slipped off his wet clothes and took a header into the bayou again.

He was down for business this time.

He had been careful to note his bearings and readily reached the cross.

Now came another of Dan's clever tricks, swimming downward under water.

"If this is really a church steeple there's a roof somewhere below," was the way he reasoned, and a moment later his feet struck something hard.

It was the roof sure enough.

Dan paddled along until he came to its end.

The roof was steep and covered with shingles.

It was a most astonishing discovery.

Here was a church standing at the bottom of the bayou.

How came it there?

Dan was no fool.

He knew that the formation of the land at the mouth of the Mississippi was constantly changing.

What had been solid ground a century ago might easily be the bottom of the bayou now.

Perhaps this church was a relic of the old Spanish times; perhaps the land on which it stood sank suddenly; if this was all true there was no telling what riches in church plate and communion service, to say nothing of Spanish gold and silver coins, the old building might contain.

Everybody in this part of Louisiana is a treasure hunter by instinct, for stories of pirates and buried gold are in everybody's mouth.

"This is something to be looked into later," thought Dan, as he hurried into his wet clothes. "After I get out of this snag I shall try it again. If there is anything inside that old ranch I intend to have it out."

Matters seemed to have quieted down over by the hut. The

voices in the canebrake had died away now and Dan came to the conclusion that the sheriff must have given it up and returned to the tug.

Unless he cut through the canebrake at the risk of losing himself there was no other way but to go along the shore to the hut.

Dan thought that he could find his way to the boat once he got back to the hut, so to the hut he now bent his steps, listening cautiously to every sound as he pushed on.

As he crept toward it from the shore, he could hear voices talking excitedly inside.

Fullham was one; the voice of the girl Nettie was the other.

"Very well, Miss Winn," the bank cashier was saying. "If you persist in accusing me wrongfully there is but one course for me to take. We are engaged to be married, and I propose that engagement shall be fulfilled. I shall appeal to your father and tell him——"

"Tell him the truth, Julius Fullham, and that will settle it!" broke in the girl's voice. "You deserted me on the steamer. You have behaved in the most outrageous and cowardly manner. I never wanted to be engaged to you. I only consented to oblige my father, and now I had rather die than become your wife."

"Very fine! Very fine, but you will find your lofty aim will not help you!" sneered Fullham. "In a moment the sheriff will be back here; before he comes I want you to promise me to say nothing of what has occurred to your father."

"Never."

"Beware! I hold Simon Winn in the hollow of my hand. I can crush him like glass and I will if you do not immediately give me your promise. Girl, do you understand?"

"Threats won't help you, Julius!" was the sneering reply. "I do not believe you—that's all."

"It's true. I declare to you, it is true. Come, Nettie, let's kiss and make up."

"Keep away from me!" screamed the girl. "Don't touch me! Help! Help!"

Suddenly the door was flung open and Dan, with his wet rags clinging to his manly form, sprang into the room.

"Take your hands off that girl! Touch her if you dare!" he shouted.

"You young pill of misery! You again!" cried Fullham, dropping his hold on Nettie and making a rush at Dan.

Dan was ready for him.

"Take that, you coward!" he cried, and then Fullham got Dan fist between the eyes and went sprawling backward upon the floor.

CHAPTER V.

DAN MISTAKEN FOR HIS DOUBLE.

Fullham was on his feet in a moment, frightened half out of his wits.

"Keep off! Keep off!" he shouted. "Don't you touch me! I'll shoot you if you do."

Dan was on him again in a moment and jammed him over against the window.

"Give me your gun!" he cried. "Take it away from him, miss! I'm good for this fellow every time. He shan't insult you again while I'm around!"

"Don't you worry. He has no revolver!" exclaimed Nettie. "He is too big a coward to dare to raise a hand against you. Take me away from here. Take me to your boat. Take me anywhere away from him."

"I'll take you to our house if you will go with me," replied

Dan, letting go his hold on Fullham, who improved the opportunity by making a dash through the door.

"I'll go anywhere with you," said Nettie. "Don't trouble about that fellow. Let him go. He is not worth bothering with. Boy, what is your name?"

"Dan Dean, miss."

"And I am Nettie Winn, daughter of Simon Winn, of Romer. Do you know my father?"

"I have heard of him."

"Can you take me to Romer in your boat?"

"It would be a long pull. You had better come across the river to our house for the night. I will take you to Romer in a wagon as soon as it is daylight."

"Very well. It shall be that way then. My father will reward you for what you have done for me."

"I don't want any reward, miss. All I want is to see fair play and do the best I can to help everybody, but—hello! They are coming again!"

"It is the sheriff!" cried Nettie, as louder shouts were heard outside. "Don't you fear. I know him well and I will tell him what you did for me. There has been some mistake, but—oh—oh—the dog! The dog!"

Suddenly a huge bloodhound burst open the door of the hut and made a rush for Dan.

It was too much for poor Nettie's overstrained nerves.

She threw up her hands and fainted.

Dan was near his death then, but the boy was game.

Like a flash he drew his bowie knife.

As the bloodhound came for him, Dan drove the glittering blade into its vitals.

With a dismal yell the dog dropped back dead, but not before he had struck Dan's shoulders with his powerful jaws, forcing the boy backward through the open window.

His head struck the ground with fearful force and there the poor boy lay just under the window, concealed by the tall marsh grass, entirely oblivious to all that went on inside the hut during the moments which followed.

When he came to himself it was with an aching head and an entire confusion of ideas.

Everything seemed dim and misty. He could not understand where he was nor how he got there.

It seemed as though there was something he ought to be doing, but for the life of him he could not recollect what it was, until suddenly the spell was broken by a loud shout right alongside of him.

"By thunder, here he is now, Nick!" a voice exclaimed. "Say, Jack, what's the matter with you? Get up, boy. Have they shot you or struck you? Was it you that done up the dawg?"

Dan was on his feet in a jiffy.

Two men caught him and pulled him up.

They were rough-looking fellows, with big white hats and pistols in their belts.

They shook Dan and kept putting the questions to him, but the boy was too much confused to answer.

"It's the river gang!" flashed over him. "They take me for that other fellow. They'd kill me if they knew who I really was."

And in that moment Dan came to a very sensible conclusion. He resolved to pose as his double.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he gasped. "I struck the dog, but he knocked me out the window. Say, let me sit down; my head is spinning like a top."

"Blame shame," said one man. "Doggone that sheriff! I'll get the best of him yet. Here, take a drink of whisky, Jack. Confound it, my bottle is empty. Let's have yours, Nick."

The other man produced a flask and Dan took a swallow of the whisky, which certainly did make him feel better.

Then the two men, with rough tenderness, started back into the canebrake away from the hut with Dan.

Dan said nothing, but stumbled on between the two men.

"You did well, Jack," said Nick; "didn't he, Ted? My time, it's the biggest haul we've made yet. Ha! Ha! We've got the best of old Fullham. Let him go north and bring down more Yankee dollars and we'll help them out with them again."

"That's what we will," replied Ted. "Blamed lucky thing that the old Twilight happened to blow her b'iler the way she did."

"The lucky part of it was that Jack happened to be on the river," replied Ted. "He's a slick card, anyhow; always around when he's wanted. Hain't you, boy? Say, how do you feel now?"

"Better," gasped Dan, getting more and more afraid of these men.

Sooner or later he was bound to be discovered. What the result would be then he hardly dared to think.

They hurried him on through the dense canebrake until suddenly their way was blocked by a man armed with a rifle who stepped out across their path.

"Who comes here?" he demanded, in a low, threatening voice.

"Brothers of the band," replied Nick, halting.

"The countersign, brother."

"M," replied Nick, promptly.

"K," said the sentinel.

"A," added Nick.

"C," said the sentinel, "and the word?"

"Arrange the letters in their proper order and I will give it," said Nick, coolly.

"No, brother. It is for you to arrange," pattered the sentinel in a fashion which showed that he had been over the same ground many times.

"M—A—C—K," answered Nick.

"Which spells?"

"The name of our illustrious captain."

"Right you are, brother. And the others?"

"I vouch for them."

"Right again. Pass on."

A step further and Dan saw a stout palisade rising before him.

There was a gate here and instantly another armed man stepped out into view.

"Halt!" he cried. "Who comes there?"

"Brothers of the band," answered Nick.

Dan was just wondering if they had to go through with the same formula again when the first sentinel called out:

"It is all right. I have examined the brothers. Let them pass on."

The gate swung open then and Dan, as he passed through it, realized that he was being conducted into the secret hold-out of the notorious river gang.

CHAPTER VI.

JOIN OR DIE.

Dan looked around curiously.

The palisade completely surrounded a long, low log hut, which stood in a little hollow about the middle of the inclosure.

Lights burned in the windows and loud voices could be heard inside as the boy was hurried toward the door.

"How do you feel now, Jack?" asked Nick. "Is your head coming straight, boy?"

"No, it's all mixed up," replied Dan, "and I'm cold all over."

"Gosh! That's your wet clothes. You'll be down with the swamp fever if you don't look out. Better get right into your bunk and take three fingers of whiskey; that will fix you all right in the morning."

"I wish I could," replied Dan. "I just don't want to talk to anybody the way I feel now."

"Then, b'gosh, you shan't," declared Nick, and he was as good as his word.

Entering the hut, Dan was quickly summoned by a dozen or more men of the same stamp as Nick and Ted.

Every man of them took him for his double.

All showered praises on him for his bold work in capturing Mr. Fullham's chest.

Dan took it all quietly, saying as little as possible.

But in spite of his coolness there was no denying that he was badly scared.

Moreover there was Mr. Fullham's trunk standing open near a table, upon which were heaped dozens of packages of greenbacks.

Two men were busy counting them.

"Fifteen thousand so far," one called out. "There must be as much as fifty or sixty thousand altogether. Gee! I don't know what cap will do, but if it was me I'd light out for a while. Jack may have knifed one bloodhound all right, but there's plumb sure to be others put out after us. This place will get too warm. Hain't that so, Jack?"

"I s'pose so," replied Dan. "I'm about used up, boys. I'm going to lie down now."

"Not till you've changed your clothes and had your drink," said Nick, and greatly to Dan's relief, he took the matter in hand himself.

Opening a locker, he took out a suit of clothes and handed them to the boy.

"There, put them on," he said. "There's a shirt for you, too. You can get along with 'em all right while yours are drying, even if they be a little large. I'll give you your drink after you get into the bunk."

This programme was carried out.

Jack was not used to whisky, and he would have liked to refuse the drink, but he did not dare.

Nick threw a big horse blanket over him, and after lying awhile the whisky did its work, and Jack began to get so sleepy that he could scarcely keep his eyes open, in spite of the loud talking and coarse laughter of the men around the table.

He fought against it all he knew, but it got the best of him at last and he fell asleep.

The next he knew there was a great racket inside the hut.

The men were running to the door and somebody shouted:

"Here comes cap! The sheriff must have gone off all right."

Dan lay perfectly still, his heart beating wildly.

Suddenly a tall man, wearing a heavy beard, stepped in through the door, followed by two others.

"It's all right, boys!" he exclaimed. "We saw the tug pull out and Fullham and the Winn girl went with it. Jack has distinguished himself to-night. If it hadn't been for him—what's this? Who is the fellow in the bunk?"

"Why, Jack, to be sure!" cried Nick, as Captain Mack suddenly broke off short and shouted out these words.

"Jack! Nonsense! Jack's with me! He's right outside now!"

Shouting these words angrily, the captain of the river gang made a rush for the bunk, seized Dan by the collar with a grip of iron and stood him on the floor.

"Speak! Who are you?" he demanded, fiercely, adding:

"Thunder and lightning! What does this mean? He's Jack's very double. Blast it all, I can't understand it. Here's Jack! Let him explain!"

It was all out now and Dan was in for it.

With Captain Mack's grip on his collar he stood facing his double, who came hurrying in through the open door.

"Gee! Is that feller here?" cried Jack, staring at Dan.

"You see! Do you know him?" thundered Captain Mack. "Who is he? Speak!"

"I don't know him. He's the feller I told you about, cap. The one I met in the upper hut."

"Just so," replied the captain giving Dan another shake. "As I thought, but how did he come here?"

"I guess I'm responsible for that," said Nick, looking a good deal alarmed.

"Ted and I found him lying outside the window, half dead. We thought he was Jack, so we brought him here."

"Let me go," said Dan. "I—I don't want to trouble you, gentlemen. I was half dazed when they found me. I didn't know what I was doing. Let me go and I'll never breathe a word about this place."

"You may be sure you never will, for you will never leave it alive!" hissed Captain Mack. "Young man, what's your name?"

"Dan Dean, sir."

"Where do you hold out?"

"Over on the other side of the river with Mr. Handy."

"Old Miser Handy?"

"Yes."

"I've heard of the man. What are you to him?"

"I don't know, sir. I've always lived with him. He says I'm no relation of his—that's all I know."

"Strange," muttered the captain, giving Dan another shake. "Strange how much you look like Jack."

"He looks enough like me to be my twin brother," put in Jack. "Can't you go light on him, cap? I would like to know more about him. Give the boy a show."

"Can't be done," replied Captain Mack. "You know the rule, Jack. No outsider can enter this place and leave it alive."

"But he was brought here, cap. He didn't come of his own free will."

Captain Mack pushed Dan from him and stood him alongside of Jack.

"Wonderfully alike!" he exclaimed. "What can it mean? Well, young fellow, I'm going to break my rule and listen to your double. There's just one way in which this thing can be overlooked and your life saved. You must become one of us. You must join the band."

"Oh, I could never do that!" cried Dan. "I—I couldn't be a—"

"A what?" thundered the captain. "Out with it. I like a fellow who talks man's talk. If you mean a thief, say a thief; call a spade a spade."

"You've said it," answered Dan. "I don't have to say the word."

"Very good," replied the captain, "then I'll say just three words more to you, Dan Dean. Join or die!"

CHAPTER VII.

DAN DOUBLES ON THE GANG.

Dan Dean was no fool. The life he led with old Miser Handy was not so attractive that he cared much whether he continued it or not.

"If I say no they'll kill me; if I say yes the chances are I can soon shake them," he thought.

"Oh, I'll join you if it comes to that," he replied, carelessly.

"I don't care much, anyhow. The old man keeps me in the swamp half the time as it is, and I might as well be with you fellows as with him."

"Good," said Captain Mack. "If you prove as smart as Jack you will never regret it. Now then, boy, no prying into our secrets. Remember, we don't know you yet. Until we get better acquainted, beware."

This was Dan's introduction to the river gang, and for several weeks he remained in or near the hut, doing all sorts of rough work. In fact, he was treated little better than a slave.

This did not suit him at all, but there was no help for it.

His principal work was to assist old Caesar, an ancient colored man, who acted as cook to the gang.

Every time his duties called him outside of the palisade, as they often did, he was closely watched, and twice shots were sent flying after him and he was roughly called back to the gate.

Captain Mack did not show himself twice during all that time, the command falling on Nick, who always spoke kindly to Dan, but declined to do much talking.

Mr. Fullham's treasure trunk disappeared that first night and Dan never caught sight of it afterward.

Almost every day the gang were off somewhere and very often they were out all night as well.

Sometimes they returned loaded down with plunder, at others there would be great talk of bad luck, and occasionally there was some allusion to the sheriff being after them, but as a rule they were very close-mouthed in Dan's presence, and the boy learned very little of their affairs.

To distinguish him from Jack, who scarcely ever spoke to him, Dan was made to wear a piece of red cloth tied around his left arm.

It was a dreary time. Day after day followed and brought no change. Dan was growing heartily sick of peeling potatoes, grinding cornmeal, fetching water, washing old Caesar's pots and pans and doing a thousand and one things of the same kind.

It is unnecessary to say that all this was worse than the life at Miser Handy's, and that Dan was only watching his opportunity to run away.

One night, after he had been in the hut something over a month, when, after a hard day's work, the boy went up into the loft where he slept, he was surprised to see the dark outlines of a human form stretched out upon the dirty mattress which he called his bed.

His first idea was that one of the gang, a little drunker than usual, had come up into the loft by mistake, and gone to sleep there, and he was just turning away to find the soft side of a plank somewhere else in the loft when he heard Jack's voice calling him in low tones:

"Come on, Dan. Come and lie down here alongside of me, but on your life don't you make any noise."

Dan lost no time in obeying, although he had grown a little afraid of Jack.

"What brings you up here?" he asked. "Why didn't you turn in downstairs in your bunk?"

"Because I wanted to speak to you, that's why. You don't mind my being here, do you, Dan?"

"Not a bit. I—"

Dan's voice choked. He felt lonely, miserable—utterly wretched. This was the first kind word that had been spoken to him in a month.

"Hush! Don't get excited," whispered Jack. "Say, Dan, I s'pose you think I've been rather hard on you?"

"No."

"Yes, you do, but you don't know. Dan, these are terrible men; much worse than you have any idea of. You would

have been taken out and shot that night you came here, just as sure as fate, if I hadn't interfered."

"I don't doubt it. I wish I could get away."

"Of course you do. That's why I sneaked up here to-night, when they think I am off doing the spy act, as I usually am. I want to help you to get away."

"Jack, if you only would!"

"I will. Wait. I want you to understand that I've taken a big liking to you, but I hain't dared to talk to you much, for I didn't want them to get onto it. Just as sure as they did it would be the worse for you in the end, and more than likely would cost you your life right now. Hark! Isn't some one coming up the ladder, Dan?"

"No. It's only some of those fellows down below. I often think they are coming up, but they never do. Jack, who are you, anyhow? How do you suppose it happens that you look so much like me?"

"Give it up. I don't know anything about myself, Dan."

"No more do I, but you must have some story to tell. How did you get here?"

"My story is a mighty short one, boy. As long ago as I can remember I lived in New Orleans with a fellow who was a professional thief, and he taught me to steal just as another boy would have been taught a trade. About two years ago he came down here and joined the river gang and brought me with him, and here I've been ever since. He's dead now. He was shot one night when we tried to hold up a cotton boat. Good job, too. He was as bad as they make 'em. That's all my story, Dan."

"What was his name?"

"His name was Ben Gravely. They call me Jack Gravely, but I wasn't his son. He often told me that."

"Strange that our stories should be so much alike, Jack."

"Isn't it? But don't let's talk any more about it now. I want to tell you how you can escape."

"How?"

"Listen. To-night the captain is coming again and the boys are going on a big expedition somewhere. I don't just know where or what it is. You crawl out the window and drop to the ground. First you'll put my clothes on and leave off that red band on your arm, of course. Then you'll go right in by the front door and turn into my bunk. When the call comes to start you'll go out with the rest and watch your chance to give them the slip. If you are half as sharp as I think you are there won't be any trouble in doing it, and, of course, you'll take mighty good care never to run foul of the river gang again."

"But you, Jack?"

"Oh, never mind me. I'll take care of myself. I know a dozen ways by which I can get out of here if I want to."

"But I hate to leave you behind, Jack."

"Don't you fret. I'll see you again some day, young feller. There's something queer about us two, and I don't think we have seen the end of it. What if we should turn out to be twin brothers after all?"

"It would be strange enough, but all the same it might be so."

"Hush! Don't talk any more. Here, I'll slip my clothes off and you put them on. The sooner you get into the bunk the better. There isn't a man among them who can tell the difference between us even in our voices. Keep as mum as possible and you run mighty little risk, and this will help you out in case you are cornered, which you won't be if you are wide awake."

Jack slipped a revolver into Dan's hand, and gave him a box of cartridges later, when he had changed his clothes and was ready to start.

It was a bold move, but, after all, the resemblance between the boys was marvelous, and Dan ran but a slight risk.

He crept along the floor of the loft, hung out of the gable window and dropped to the ground boldly, entering the hut a moment later, where a dozen or more of the gang sat smoking, playing poker and telling stories.

"Hello, Jack! Where you been?" asked Nick, shuffling his cards for another deal.

"Oh, up the shore a piece," replied Dan, carelessly. "I'm tired out now and I mean to turn in."

"Don't get too sound asleep, boy," said Nick, throwing around the cards. "Remember to-night."

Suddenly a peculiar whistle sounded outside and all hands sprang to their feet.

"It's the captain now!" cried Nick.

Dan had not been a moment too soon, for at the same instant the door opened and Captain Mack came striding into the room.

"Evening, all hands!" he exclaimed. "The tug is in the bayou. Get your rifles and get aboard. There isn't a moment to be lost."

Ten minutes later Dan was steaming down the bayou toward the river, neither Captain Mack nor any of his men imagining for an instant that it was Dan's double and not Dan who had been left behind in the hut.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ATTACK ON THE COTTON BARGE.

"Well, Jack, where do you think we are going, boy?"

Dan was standing at the bow of the tug as it turned out of the bayou into the river, when Captain Mack suddenly came up behind him and put his arm around the boy's neck.

"I'm sure I don't know, cap," was the reply. Dan imitated Jack's manner as closely as possible and the leader of the river gang never suspected for an instant that he was making a mistake.

"I don't suppose you do," he replied. "None of the boys know, but I'm going to tell you, Jack, for I've got something special to say in connection with this night's work."

"What's that, cap?" asked Dan.

"Keep quiet; don't look around. Don't let any of the boys notice that I am saying anything special to you. Jack, I'm a bit superstitious maybe, but something seems to tell me that trouble will come upon me to-night."

"I hope not, cap."

"No more than I do, boy, and I tell you right now that I don't know of any reason why this notion should have seized me, but in case I am right I want you to promise me one thing."

"What's that?"

"If I am killed, or if anything serious happens which may seem to warrant your doing it, take this letter to Romer and give it secretly to Miss Nettie Winn. That's the girl who was here on the island the night the sheriff came. You saw her then and you will know her if you see her again, I suppose."

"I certainly shall," replied Jack.

"Then do as I tell you and don't forget it. I've always used you well, haven't I, Jack?"

"Always."

"Not that you didn't deserve it. You have always been one of the best men I've had, young as you are. Now, here's more. Put the letter in your pocket and put this package with it. In case anything happens it's yours to do as you like with. If all goes well you may return it to me. You understand?"

"Yes. I'll do just as you say."

"Good boy. A word more about that double of yours. Don't let him get away from you. for there is no doubt that he is—"

"Coming!" called Nick. "She's just turning the bend!"

It was most provoking. Dan felt that he was right on the verge of hearing some disclosure of great importance, but it was too late now.

A tug, pulling after it a long cotton barge, had just turned the bend of the river and was slowly puffing her way toward the gulf, towing her heavy load.

Captain Mack immediately went into the pilot house and took his station beside the pilot, who was a man Dan had not seen before.

As for the others, they began putting on their black cloth masks, and Dan followed their example.

As they drew nearer, the tug keeping well in the shadow of the great trees, loaded down with their weight of Spanish moss which overhung the river bank, the men lay down along the deck, grasping their rifles and waiting for what was to come.

And Dan knew very well what it all meant.

More than once the river gang had captured a cotton barge on its way to some steamer lying below the bar.

What they did with the captured cotton nobody ever knew, but there was little trouble on that score, for it was an easy matter to tow the barge in among the bayous where some light draft steamer could meet them and take their load out to sea to meet a foreign steamer already engaged to help out in this crooked work.

As the cotton tow drew near the tug suddenly shot out from its concealment and struck directly across their path.

A sharp whistle followed.

"Ahoy there! Where the blazes are you heading?" roared the captain of the advancing tug.

He found out in a moment.

Captain Mack, who was masked now, seized the wheel and drove his tug alongside.

"Stop where you are!" he shouted. "Give the engineer the bell or you are a dead man."

"Who says so?" roared the cotton boat captain. "What in thunder is all this?"

"Stop in the name of the river gang!" shouted Captain Mack, and then the climax came.

Suddenly twenty or more masked men armed with rifles rose into view behind the tug's rail, covering the captain and deck hands on the other tug, at which the darky roustabouts on the cotton bales all began yelling together, making the air fairly ring with their wild shouts.

"I surrender!" cried the cotton boat captain. "I can't buck against the river gang; but say, cap, you'll give my roustabouts a chance to get aboard, I s'pose?"

"Yes, if you're quick," replied Captain Mack.

"An easy mark, boys," he called down to his men, adding:

"Hey, you, Jack! It seems I was scared at my shadow after all!"

No one knew what this meant but Dan, and he made no answer.

The tug was now permitted to back up to the barge, which was piled high with the cotton bales, and the roustabouts tumbled aboard, covered all the while by the rifles of the gang.

"Cut loose!" ordered Captain Mack then.

The hawser was cast off and the barge swung in toward shore, being caught in the current which sets around Coeur d'Alene Island.

"Pull out!" shouted the leader of the river gang.

This seemed to be a signal for the men also, for all discharged their rifles in the air, Dan firing with the rest.

The tug steamed away, but it moved slowly.

"Something wrong. They are hanging back, cap," cried Nick.

"Nonsense! They are curious to see what we are going to do, that's all," retorted the captain, turning the wheel over to his companion.

He was down among his men in a moment and the tug shot alongside the drifting barge, when all at once the cotton bales were alive with armed men.

"Fire! Shoot the thieves down without mercy!" yelled Sheriff Brown, who appeared at the bow.

Bang, bang went the rifles.

The volley poured into the tug was tremendous.

Captain Mack fell at the first fire.

The pilot was shot dead at his wheel.

A dozen men dropped around Dan, who dodged down behind the rail to save himself, and while the other tug came steaming toward them the same murderous fire was rained upon the river gang.

CHAPTER IX.

FIGHTING FOR LIFE.

For a moment the cotton thieves held out against the sheriff's vigorous attack and returned the fire in a half-hearted way.

It was a hopeless case, however.

On the cotton bales were at least fifty men.

Sheriff Brown was out for business that night.

He had deliberately set a trap for the river gang, and Captain Mack had just as deliberately walked into it.

In a few moments the game was played to a finish.

At least half the gang had been shot outright, besides many who were wounded.

A few jumped into the water and swam for the shore, while the remainder fell into the hands of the sheriff.

The gang was broken up forever, as it richly deserved to be, and the sheriff had won laurels for himself without the loss of a man.

That among those who took to the water was Dan Dean need scarcely be said.

Dan was good to swim the Mississippi any day in the week, and he had no notion of falling into the hands of the sheriff that night.

But he did not go alone.

Captain Mack stood right alongside of him when he was shot.

"Jack! Save me! I'm shot!" he gasped. "Oh, don't desert me now!"

"Drop into the water," whispered Jack. "It's all against us. Drop into the water, cap."

"And desert the boys? Never! Besides, I've got a bullet in the left shoulder. I can't swim."

"I can and I can help you up!" whispered Dan. "Now, then, cap, every man for himself, but I'm going to stick to you."

Encouraged by Dan's energy, Captain Mack dropped overboard, Dan instantly following him.

"Keep close to me," he said, flinging his arm around the captain. "Use your legs. Kick out. Hold your arms still. I can get you ashore."

Perhaps he might if they had not been instantly discovered.

It was bright moonlight and the sheriff's eyes were sharp.

"There goes the head bower of the pack!" he shouted. "I know him! That big fellow with the boy! Fire! Let 'em have it! He shan't escape!"

The rifles cracked again and again.

"I've got another shot, Jack!" gasped Captain Mack, sud-

denly pulling away. "Good-by, boy! I'm a goner. Don't forget the letter. Good-by."

Dan was struggling all he knew to hold him up as he thus spoke.

It was a useless effort.

In spite of all he could do the captain of the river gang slipped from his grasp and sank.

Dan was pulled down with him and surely would have been drowned if he had not let go his hold.

This saved him from the sheriff's bullets.

Dan struck out under water and swam as he had never swam before, heading for the thick bushes which lined the shore.

When he came up he was among them. There was no footing here, however, but all mud and slime when he tried to put his feet down.

He swam on, almost winded by his exertions, penetrating into a little bayou at last.

He could hear the shouts off on the river and see the flashing lights as he looked back.

"They went this way," called a voice close behind him. "They were only doubling on us. I don't believe they were drowned!"

The splash of oars was very near when Dan managed to gain a footing on the edge of the bayou.

A false step brought him into the mud again.

He floundered about and tried to step on what he supposed to be a log, half on the shore and half in the water, when, to his horror, there were the open jaws of a huge alligator right before him.

Crack!

A shot from out of the bushes.

The alligator slid into the water, which was instantly dyed red with his blood, and at the same time a strong hand seized the terrified boy by the collar and pulled him upon solid ground.

"Dan! For heaven's sake! What has happened?"

"Oh, Jack!" gasped Dan. "Oh, Jack!"

It was all he could say, for every bit of his strength seemed suddenly to have deserted him.

Then an arm was thrown about his waist and he was dragged in among the bushes.

Dan thought it was a fine thing to have a double just about then.

"Jack, the sheriff has got them all," he gasped out. "Captain Mack is dead and the whole gang broken up!"

"Hooray!" cried Jack. "There's a chance for me now! Hooray!"

"There they are! There they are among the bushes!" cried a voice, and the sheriff's boat came shooting up the bayou.

"That's my fool work! So much for hollering!" breathed Jack, "but they shan't get you, Dan!"

Bang! Bang! went the rifles at the same instant, and two shots came whizzing toward the boys.

CHAPTER X.

TALKING IT OVER WITH JACK.

"Lay low, young fellow! Lay low! They'll be past us in a minute. Don't you give yourself away!"

Dan, crouching among the canebrake beside his double, lay as still as a mouse while the boatload of the sheriff's men shot past them up the bayou.

They could see it distinctly; they could hear every word that was said.

"I think it was the boy Mr. Fullham told us about," remarked one of the men. "I'm not sure of it, but I think so. If we could only lay hands on him it would do the job up brown."

"Are you sure he went this way?" asked another of the party. "Seems to me we ought to see him if he came in here."

"Unless he was shot and went to the bottom of the bayou."

"By Jove! I wouldn't wonder! Here, turn your lantern this way—what's that on the water, Steve?"

"Blood, by gracious!"

"You're right. When he hollered that time I thought there was something wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that an old 'gator has got him."

"Gee! I wouldn't wonder if you were right."

So the talk went on.

After a little further search they gave it up, coming to the conclusion that an alligator had done the business for Dan.

It was a case of getting the cart before the horse.

If they had looked along a little further they would have found the carcass of a dead alligator floating on the water.

No such discovery was made, however, and in a few moments the boat put back on the river and was seen no more.

"There!" exclaimed Jack, when the sound of the oars died away. "We are safe now, bub, and I'm going to holler! I must or I'll bust!"

"No, no! Keep quiet. Do keep quiet," said Dan. "Jack, we shan't be safe till we get back to the island, if we can."

"What's to hinder?"

"Can we walk on the water?"

"Don't have to, boy. I've got a boat!"

"A boat!"

"Bless your heart, yes. How do you suppose I ever came to be here? Did you think I flew over from the island? Come on."

Dan pushed in among the canebrake and presently came to a small lagoon completely surrounded by the tall reeds.

Here a rowboat lay, and the boys lost no time in boarding her.

A moment later and Jack was pulling leisurely up the bayou, talking as he rowed along.

"No; I had no trouble whatever getting out, Dan," he said. "I was only a few minutes behind you, but why didn't you make your escape when you had the chance?"

"Couldn't; tried my best. The captain kept close to me all the while."

"He never suspected?"

"Oh, no! I guess he didn't," and Dan went on to tell what had occurred.

"It was a put-up job," said Jack, decidedly. "I've known for a long time that it was bound to come sooner or later. Captain Mack got too bold. I'm so glad he's dead, Dan. I want to quit this life. I don't know why I should hate it so when I have never known any other, but I do."

"And you mean to be straight from this on?" asked Dan.

"You bet I do. That is, if they will let me. Can't say what will happen, though. May have to steal to keep myself from starving. Anyhow, I'm blamed tired of being a thief."

Dan sat quiet for some time, thinking.

As yet he had said nothing about the letter and the package.

He was a faithful boy and square as a die in all his dealings. He had given Captain Mack his promise and he meant that it should be fulfilled to the letter.

"Where are we going?" he suddenly asked.

"To the upper hut first. I've got some clothes there. Once we can get them I propose to go to New Orleans. I wish you'd go with me, Dan."

"Perhaps I will, Jack, but not just now."

"Why?"

"Can I trust you?"

"You bet you can. I never had a friend in all my life and now——"

"Well, Jack?"

"I'd like to have you for one if you'll let me."

"Why not? I know of no reason. I'm going to show you that I'm your friend, for I'm going to tell you all that's in my mind."

"Hold on! Let me tell you something first," broke in Jack. "There's nothing to hinder us from making a big thing out of this disaster to the gang, providing we can find out one thing."

"Which is?"

"Where Captain Mack has hidden his money."

"You know?"

"I don't. Only he and Nick Nivens knew that secret."

"No one else?"

"None. Is Nick dead?"

"I believe him to be, but say, Jack, would you take stolen money and use it for yourself? The Romer Bank money for instance?"

"Why not? With that money to divide between us, Dan, we two poor boys could suddenly be transformed into a pair of rich young gentlemen. Think of what that would mean to us! You don't know the world. I do. I tell you——"

"No, Jack, don't tell me. I'll never do it. Never! If we can find where the money is hidden and restore it to its rightful owners that will be doing the straight thing, and that's what I mean to do every time."

"It's a blame sight easier to be good when you are rich than when you are poor, young fellow," growled Jack.

"No."

"I say yes. Besides, if we were to find the boodle and take it back to the bank we'd be arrested sure."

There was something in this argument certainly. Dan made no answer, but he inwardly resolved to keep the story of the letter to himself.

He had hardly come to this conclusion when the boat shot out into the river on the south side of the island. There was the hut on the higher ground and there, a little beyond, was the place where Dan had made his remarkable discovery under the river.

A sudden desire to know more of the mystery seized the boy. Could there be a better time than the present?

Hardly.

By the next day the sheriff might come swooping down on the holdout of the river gang.

"What's the matter with you? What makes you so silent?" asked Jack, suddenly.

"I was thinking."

"Of what?"

"Don't like the way you talk, Jack. You said just now that you meant to be square and yet——"

"Hold up!" broke in Jack. "Hear me, Dan! I take it all back. I will be square. I like you and for your sake I promise that I won't touch one penny of the stolen money. There, will that do?"

"Jack, you won't regret it."

"Don't know. I'm bound to do it anyhow. Now what was you going to say?"

"I'll tell you some other time. Look here, how well can you swim?"

"I don't know anybody who can beat me."

"And dive?"

"Same with diving. What are you driving at, anyhow?"

"Suppose I was to show you a way by which we could both become suddenly rich without touching a penny of the stolen money of the river gang, what then?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I don't know. It may all be nonsense, but——"

"What?"

"Pull across to the other shore there, Jack, and I'll tell you. There may be nothing at all in the business, or it may be the biggest thing that ever happened to a couple of poor fellows like you and me."

CHAPTER XI.

THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTERS OF THE BAYOU.

"What in the world are you driving at, Dan? Explain yourself," repeated Jack, as he pulled across the cove to the other shore.

"Did you ever hear of the church under the river?" asked Dan in his cool way.

To his surprise Jack gave a shout.

"There!" he cried. "That's where they've hid the boodle. That's what those mysterious hints about going to church meant. Dan, what do you know? Out with it. I've long suspected something of this kind."

Dan told his story, Jack listening with eager attention.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "This beats the band, but it can't be what I meant. There was no diving done. The rule was with our boodle that Captain Mack and Nick took full charge of it and at times there used to be a dividing up among the boys. When a haul was made it was counted there in the big room, as you saw Fullham's money being counted that night. Then we were all made to go out and Nick and the boss were left alone. When they were through their private business a bell would ring and we went back again, but there was never any money in sight then. Nobody in the gang knew what they did with it, although you can bet your sweet life we have all searched and tried to find out where they hid it many a time. The boss used to call it going to church, and that's where it hitches on to your strange story, Dan, but it can't be that there is any connection between the two."

But this was all a puzzle to Dan.

They had now reached the spot where he had made his dive and it was quite a little distance from the thick canebrake in which the lower hut lay hidden.

It seemed hard to imagine that there could be any secret means of reaching the sunken church from the hut.

"We'll look into that business later," Dan said, after they had discussed the matter for a few moments. "Here we are, Jack. This is where I did my diving. Question is, shall we try our luck again right now?"

"You bet! I'm with you every time, Dan."

"Good enough! Then here goes. If that church went down all of a sudden away back in the old Colonial days, you can bet your life there's lots of church plate and perhaps money hidden inside of it. That's ours if we can get it up, Jack, so here goes for a try."

So much for Dan's reading. Old Colonial days in Louisiana had long been the hobby of this strange boy. History was his pet study and Miser Handy had humored him in the matter of books, as we have already said.

While the boys were undressing, Dan told Jack strange things about the richness of the old Jesuit churches in this part of Louisiana back in Colonial times.

"You see, Jack," he went on to say, "this part of the river was all different then. There were rich plantations all along here until the great earthquake of 1808 came and swallowed

them up. The river rose then higher than ever before, and the earthquake caused the land to settle. You see the swamp mud on top now, but underneath it is solid ground and hundreds of houses must be buried down there somewhere. Mr. Handy has often told me that his father could remember when there were plantations all over these parts; anyhow, the church under the river is no myth. Now then, will you try it first or shall I?"

"Just as you say, Dan."

"Go ahead. See if you can find the steeple," said Dan, and he stood on the shore in the moonlight, while Jack dived into the river.

"How much he looks like me!" he thought. "Can there be anything in it? What if it turned out that we were brothers? I must open that package first chance I get, but I don't propose to tell him about it till I know what it all means."

He waited

Not a sound broke the stillness except the occasional hooting of an owl in the swamp.

"Will he never come up?" thought Dan. "By gracious, he beats me staying under water. Hello! Here he comes now!"

Suddenly Jack appeared above the surface, panting for breath.

"It's there, Dan!" he cried. "By thunder, I sat on the cross and worked my way down the steeple to the roof. The church under the river is no lie."

"What did I tell you?" replied Dan. "Well, I've done as much as that myself. What we want to do now is to get inside."

"It can be done."

"I know it. I can do it."

"So can I. Dan, this is great. I feel as if we were on the verge of a big discovery."

"That's what we are, Jack. Good heavens, how much you do look like me with your clothes off! It seems just as if I was looking in the glass."

"Isn't it so? What can it mean?"

"That's more than I can tell you."

"I know what I wish it might mean."

"That we were brothers, Dan."

"It might be so."

"Yes, and something seems to tell me that it is so. Do you know, I never felt toward any fellow the way I feel toward you?"

"Let's drop on that and make another try. Have you got your wind again?"

"Yes. I'm good for another dive any time. Shall we go together?"

"I don't see why not. It's all quiet here."

"Only thing is if any of the boys have escaped they will be pretty sure to try to work their way back to the hut."

They listened and watched for a moment, but the silence of the night was unbroken.

"Ready?" cried Dan. 6

"Yes."

"All right. Here goes."

They dived together and the water closed over them.

It was a queer way of going to church.

But the church under the river was there, and this time Dan meant to see the inside of it.

It was impossible to follow Jack's movements under the water, for all was guess-work, and had to be done by feeling.

The last Dan saw of him was when they struck the cross.

He did not pause a moment, but pulled away, and, throwing out his hands, struck boldly out for the bottom.

Down he went—down—down—down!

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHERIFF POPS UP JUST AT THE WRONG TIME.

It was a bold move on Dan's part, and its success depended entirely upon his being able to keep his breath.

With nothing to guide him but his own idea of what the shape of the building must be, Dan passed down over the roof, found the wall of the church all right, and, keeping close to it, groped for a window.

The wall was of wood and all in an instant Dan came to a break.

"A window!" he thought, and so it was. In a moment he was able to measure its width with his hands.

The window was long and narrow; as his wind still held out, Dan struck boldly through it.

He was inside the church now, still swimming; again he turned downward and in a moment his feet struck against something hard.

Was it the gallery railing?

Dan thought so; but he did not feel it stop him. Time was pressing and above all there was the horrible fear that when he started to rise he would not be able to find the window again, still he struck down, shaping his course toward the end of the church, where he thought the altar ought to be.

In a moment his feet rested upon it. Any doubt about its being the altar was instantly solved when he dropped still lower and his hands came in contact with a big candlestick, which he was able to recognize on account of its shape.

"I've struck it now!" thought Dan, triumphantly, and he clutched the candlestick and turned on his tracks.

It was a terrible strain. He could feel his breath going. It seemed as if he must open his mouth or die.

But he fought against it bravely. The moonlight striking down through the water showed him the outlines of the windows.

Dan made for the nearest and struck right through it, for all seemed to be open.

Then, in a second, he was on the surface again, waving his candlestick above his head to Jack, who was standing on the shore.

"By gracious, you've got it!" cried Jack, as he scrambled up on the bank. "A candlestick! Is it gold?"

"Give it up. Take it," panted Dan.

He sank down all in a heap. It was some minutes before he was able to utter another word.

"It's certainly gold!" exclaimed Jack, examining the candlestick closely. "You beat me, Dan. I went down in front and found the door, but I did not dare to stay any longer. How did you get inside?"

"Through the window."

"And found this on the altar?"

"I think it must have been the altar; there's lots more stuff there, too. Jack, do you really think it's gold?"

"I'm sure of it. I know gold when I see it, I guess. We must go for the rest of those things, boy."

"That's what. We'll keep together next time. I don't see anything to hinder us from clearing off that altar before morning. Each time it ought to be easier, now that we know just where to go."

Jack was only too ready to make the attempt and it proved a complete success.

Without any great difficulty the boys passed over the altar again.

Of course it was impossible to see what each other was doing, but when they met on the surface Jack had another candlestick, while Dan brought up a golden cup and a beautiful host,

elegantly wrought, and studded all over with colored stones, which might be only glass, or might be gems of priceless value for all they could tell.

Again and again they descended, each time bringing up some article of church plate, generally gold, occasionally of silver.

At last Dan came up with an oblong wooden box, which was so heavy that it was all he could do to rise with it.

This was the triumph of the night's work.

The sun was just rising when Jack came up, bringing a splendid chalice, but he was so badly fatigued that he declared nothing would induce him to go down again.

"I know where you got that," he panted, pointing to the box. "It was right on the edge of the altar. I had my hand on it once, but it was so heavy that I did not dare to risk it. Is the lid fastened down?"

"Yes, but it's so rotten that it's easy opened," replied Jack, giving the box a smart kick.

The sides instantly fell apart, and out came coins innumerable, gold, silver and a few coppers.

At the same instant the boys were startled by hearing the grinding of a propeller on the other side of the bushes which covered the point of land on their left.

"A tug coming," whispered Jack, springing up. "What on earth shall we do?"

"Dive!" cried Dan.

"And leave all this treasure?"

"Dive and they will never know that it's here."

"It's the sheriff sure. Here goes!" exclaimed Dan.

Like a flash both boys plunged into the river.

They were not an instant too soon, for the tug came steaming around the point.

Crowded on the narrow deck were Sheriff Brown and a dozen men.

"What was that splash?" shouted the sheriff. "Didn't I see some one jump into the water over there?"

Crouching under the water Dan heard the cry in deep dismay.

What if the sheriff should spy all that golden treasure which lay scattered about on the shore?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST WORDS OF CAPTAIN MACK.

Diving to dodge the sheriff, Dan went down deeper than he had intended—in fact, before he knew it he found himself gliding alongside the submerged church steeple until his hands touched the peak of the roof.

He immediately struck out and rose with a long sweep, coming to the surface at a considerable distance from what he supposed would be the course of the tug.

He never doubted that Jack was close behind him, for they had both taken the dive together, but in this he made a big mistake, for Jack was already in the sheriff's clutches on board the tug.

It was all a blunder for Jack to think of going down again. He was badly winded and very much fatigued when he took the dive.

The moment he got under the water he knew he could not stand it and up he came right alongside the tug.

"There he is!" shouted the sheriff.

"That's the boy who robbed me!" bawled Fullham.

"Come aboard or I'll shoot you dead!" cried the sheriff, level-

ing a rifle at poor Jack, who was almost dead as it was and just able to motion for some one to throw him a line.

There was no delay about this, for the sheriff had one ready.

Jack clutched at it desperately. They pulled him aboard and the tug steamed on up the bayou.

Poor Dan rose to the surface just in time to see Jack standing between Fullham and the sheriff, who were too deeply interested in their capture to notice him.

Dan was in despair.

He felt as though he was deserting his double to remain there idly treading water and watching the disappearing tug.

There was nothing that he could do, however, and in the end Dan went ashore and hurried back to the place where the treasure lay.

The sight of Jack's shabby old clothes lying beside his own almost unmanned him. He hurriedly dressed himself and tried to think, his thoughts running something like this:

"I can't do anything for him by staying here; they'll take him to Romer and put him in jail. If I want to help him the best thing I can do is to go up there."

This was only part, for Dan's thoughts ran fast.

When he got to Romer what could he do for Jack? It would take money and influence to get him out of the clutches of the law. The poor fellow had not a friend on earth besides himself. He had been a member of the river gang and Fullham would see to it that every means was taken to convict him. Money was the only thing that would save the unfortunate boy.

"And I can get money," thought Dan. "Look here!"

He pointed to the heap of valuable articles which he and Jack, with so much exertion, had brought up from the church under the river.

"Half is his, anyhow," murmured Dan, "and he can have my half, too, and welcome if it will keep him out of the penitentiary. Then there's the letter to Miss Nettie Winn. I promised and I must carry out my promise. It seems a big undertaking for a poor fellow like me, who was never outside of the swamps, but I'm going to try it. I'd do anything for Jack, and as for that fellow Fullham, I'll show him that he can't down me."

What was Dan's scheme?

Whatever it was he started to carry it out then and there with that same quiet determination that characterized everything he did.

First he loaded the treasure into the boat, and then getting in himself, he pulled toward the upper hut. He wanted provisions and he knew they could be found there, for Jack had told him so. He wanted a box to pack the church plate in and he felt pretty sure that he would find that, too.

It all came out just as he had planned.

While at the hut, with his boat carefully concealed among the canebrake, Dan saw the tug steam back down the bayou.

There were several men standing on deck, and as there were good lights on the tug, Dan was able to recognize them as the men who had been left behind in the lower hut when Captain Mack started off on his disastrous raid.

This proved that the secret holdout of the river gang had been captured.

Dan saw nothing of Jack as the tug steamed by, but he did not doubt for a moment that he was still on board.

Waiting for it to get well out of the way, the boy dragged the box down to the boat and proceeded to pack up his valuable cargo. Hammer and nails had been discovered in the hut, so he was able to do the job up in good shape.

The sun was just rising as he reached the river and Dan turned the boat down-stream instead of up toward Romer. He

meant to make his first stop at Bascom's Landing, five miles below, but his ultimate destination was New Orleans.

"I'll sell this stuff for whatever it will bring," was his determination. "Money talks and money I must have. I don't know as I shall ever get back to Father Handy's, and if I never do I don't know as I very much care."

There was not much need of rowing now, for the current carried the boat swiftly along.

A spare moment had come to Dan at last. He shipped his oars, and, feeling in his coat pocket, drew out the package and the letter.

Not one boy in a thousand could have restrained his curiosity as Dan had done, but our hero was a young man of great force of character. He had accepted the charge given him by Captain Mack in good faith. The man had supposed he was trusting Jack; Dan could not deceive him, therefore he felt all the more determined to carry out the trust to the letter, whatever its nature might be.

With a glance at Nettie Winn's name he restored the letter to his pocket and proceeded to open the package, which was not addressed to any one.

If Jack had remained with him he would have given him both letter and package, but the way things had turned out Dan felt perfectly justified in breaking the seal himself.

The first thing he saw as he turned back the wrapper was a fat bundle of bills. He hastily counted them and found that there was more than a thousand dollars. There was a piece of paper pinned to the topmost bill upon which was written: "Your share, Jack."

Dan put the bills in his pocket and turned his attention to an unsealed letter, which was the only other thing the package contained, and which read as follows:

"JACK.—I have strong reason to believe that you are a much more important person than you suppose yourself to be. How I learned the facts which have brought me to this conclusion don't matter, but here is what I am driving at, my boy. Did you ever hear of Judge Fullham, of Romer—the father of the bank cashier? Probably not. Let me tell you who he is in a few words; the richest plantation owner in Plaquemine Parish, and one of the richest in Louisiana. He inherited this property, which is worth half a million dollars, from his sister, Catherine Fullham Bowner, to whom it was left by their father, the judge being cut off with a shilling by the will of old John Fullham on account of his wild ways. Bowner, the judge's brother-in-law, died about eighteen years ago, being shot in a duel. His death drove his wife half crazy, and, to make matters worse, on the very same day her twin sons disappeared; it was supposed that they wandered down to the bank of the river, and, falling in, were drowned. There was every reason to believe this, for their hats were found floating on the water far down the river, and there were other things which pointed that way, but I have reason to believe that it was a put-up job, that the boys were stolen by the colored nurse, bribed by Judge Fullham. The courts, however, accepted the proof of death. Mrs. Bowner died from the shock, and all the property went to the judge, who still holds it. Now, Jack, suppose I could prove that you were one of those missing lads? And I think I can do it. If anything happens to me go at once to New Orleans and call on Mr. J. T. Somers, No. 98 Carondelet street, and tell him—"

"Boat ahoy! Look out where you're going, or by thunder, I'll run you down!"

Suddenly the cry came ringing in Dan's ear.

He looked up and saw a river steamer right ahead of him.

So preoccupied had he been that he had not noticed it, and now here it was coming straight for the boat.

CHAPTER XIV.

ABOUT THE RIOT IN ROMER.

Dan seized his oars and pulled the boat to one side.

"Hello, there! Hello!" he shouted. "Take me aboard! I'll pay double fare!"

Now it does not require much effort to stop one of those small steamers which ply between New Orleans and the mouth of the Mississippi.

The captain of the Leopard was an obliging sort of fellow, and, happening to be in the mood, he stopped the steamer.

Dan pulled alongside and was helped on board with his box.

"How about the boat, bub?" asked the captain.

"Let it go," replied Dan. "It belongs to me and I have no further use for it. I'd rather lose a dozen boats than be delayed in getting to New Orleans."

The captain began to ask questions, but Dan had his little story ready and his money, too.

The captain's respect for the boy increased when he pulled out a great roll of bills and paid double fare for his passage up to the Crescent City.

Perhaps half the amount was all the company ever saw, but at all events the captain said no more about the matter and Dan was left to himself until the Leopard ran alongside the levee at New Orleans.

Dan had been up to the city before several times, and he had his mind fully made up what to do.

There were plenty of cabs on the levee awaiting the arrival of the steamer and he immediately hailed one of the drivers.

"I want you to take me to Bender's Hotel," he said.

"Who's to pay?" asked the driver, suspiciously.

"I am. What's the fare?"

"Two dollars."

"Here you are. Get my box off, will you? It's heavy. I'll help you if you can't lift it alone. Get me up to the hotel as soon as you can."

The driver had all he could do to lift the box, for it was indeed heavy, but with Dan's help it was soon in the cab and a little later Dan reached Bender's Hotel, which was a third-rate house on St. Antoine street, where Mr. Handy usually stayed on his visits to the city and where Dan himself was well known.

"Where's your father?" asked the landlord, looking curiously at Dan's shabby clothes when he first entered the office.

"He couldn't come this time," replied Dan. "I left in a hurry. I'll pay you for two days in advance, Mr. Bender. I suppose you don't care to run up a bill with a fellow like me."

"That's the idea," replied the landlord, receiving the money with a look of satisfaction. "It's all right, though. Of course I know your father is good for it. Here you, Jim, take Mr. Handy's box upstairs."

The colored porter flew to obey. Dan kept close after him, carefully locking the door behind the porter as soon as he had left the room.

"At last!" he muttered. "Now if I don't surprise some of those fellows down at Romer my name is not Dan Dean."

If Dan had been in Romer just then he would have found the whole town in a fever of excitement.

Eight members of the notorious river gang had been jailed in the early morning, and now the sheriff and Mr. Julius Fullham had come in with several more.

Among them was a good looking boy dressed only in a pair of old tattered trousers and a gunny sack for a shirt.

There was talk of lynching as the sheriff marched his prisoners to the jail, and at every step the crowd increased and the threats grew louder, but the sheriff was a bold man

and knew his business. He drew his revolver and fired over the heads of the crowd, driving them back.

This time he succeeded in safely jailing his prisoners, but the whole town was in a ferment, which increased as night came on and reached its height next day when the prisoners were conducted through the streets on foot on their way to court.

"Lynch 'em! Lynch 'em!" the crowd shouted. "They've robbed us! Don't leave them to the law! Hang them right now!"

Jack, who was the last in the little procession, turned his head to look at the mob which was pressing the officers behind him.

All at once there was a rush for the prisoners. The sheriff was thrown down and the officers overcome, the angry crowd seizing hold of the prisoners, while cries of "Lynch 'em! Lynch 'em!" added to the din.

Two men caught Jack. He tried to fight them off, but it was useless.

They hustled him into the middle of the street and ran him toward the public square; ahead of them were others of the gang in the same fix.

Poor Jack gave up all hope as they neared the entrance to the square, where men were running about with ropes, getting ready for the work.

Jack's captors were just turning into the square when suddenly a young and very pretty girl pushed her way through the crowd and confronted them.

"Stop!" she cried. "Don't hang that boy! Some of you know me, and you all know my father, Simon Winn. I ask you to let that boy live. He is a brave fellow. He saved my life, and I would save his now. Listen to me, friends. I say once more, don't hang that boy!"

CHAPTER XV.

DAN DOUBLES ON HIS DOUBLE.

It sometimes takes but a little thing to turn the tide of feeling where an angry mob is concerned.

Nettie Winn was well known in Romer and universally popular.

The crowd was inclined to listen to her, and the men who held Jack paused.

"He's as bad as the rest of them," said one. "We'll never get justice done to these fellows, Miss Winn. If your father was here I'm sure he would say go ahead."

The crowd inside the fence which surrounded the square came pressing against it to see what the matter was, while Nettie continued to plead.

This delay gave the sheriff just the chance he wanted. He rallied his men, and, calling out for all good citizens to help him, charged boldly on the crowd.

Many joined him, and the result was a fierce fight.

Revolvers were drawn and bowie knives flourished.

A free fight was soon in full progress. It was every man for himself, and the scene which followed was such as Romer had never witnessed before.

Many lost their lives in that fight, and many others were severely wounded, three of the prisoners being shot dead before the sheriff finally succeeded in marching them back to jail.

At the very beginning of the melee Jack saw his chance to escape. Tearing himself free from his captors, he ran for his life, fighting his way to the edge of the crowd, dodging down

an alley and gaining a side street, which was comparatively deserted.

Here the poor boy paused, all breathless.

Which way should he go? His appearance was sure to betray him, whichever way he went.

As he was staring about, uncertain what to do, he heard a sound behind him, and, looking back, saw Nettie Winn flying toward him on a bicycle.

There were others behind her. Several men had just turned the corner, and were running down the street as the brave girl jumped off her wheel at Jack's side.

"Oh, Dan!" she exclaimed. "Are you here? This way! Right through that gate. This is where I live. I can hide you in the house."

"Thank you, miss," replied Jack, "but it won't work. It will only get you into trouble. Show me which street will take me out of town, and I'll run for it, or, better still, lend me your wheel."

"Take it!" cried Nettie. "I haven't forgotten what you did for me on the river the other night. Take it and slip into the alley. The cross street beyond will take you out of town."

"You are mistaken," said Jack. "I don't want to deceive you. I'm not Dan Dean."

"What!" gasped Nettie.

"No; I'm his double. Good-by, miss; thank you a thousand times. I'll send back the wheel."

Jack threw himself upon the bicycle and was off like a shot into the alley, leaving Nettie standing against the fence, puzzled beyond measure at what had occurred.

But the crowd was coming, and, with one hurried look behind her, the girl went into the house, opening the door with her latch key.

It was rather an elegant establishment, for Simon Winn was reckoned a rich man in Romer.

What his business was no one exactly knew. His neighbors had him down for a speculator in cotton. He was away from home most of the time, leaving his daughter to run the house with the aid of two or three colored servants. Thus Nettie was free to come and go as she pleased. As she entered the house, a young man came hurriedly out of the parlor.

"Ah, Nettie, so you are back!" he exclaimed. "I've been waiting for you this half hour. Upon my word, I think I must have dropped asleep."

Nettie's eyes flashed.

"How dare you come here, Julius Fullham!" she exclaimed. Haven't I told you that I never wished to see your face again?"

"Yes, you told me so, but I don't believe you can be in earnest," was the reply. "I want you to think better of it. Something has happened that makes it necessary that you should have a protector. I've got strange news for you, my dear girl. Sad news it is, too. I——"

"My father! Has anything happened to him?" gasped Nettie, turning pale.

"Your father is——"

"Dead? Yes. I see it in your face!" screamed the poor girl.

"He is!" said Fullham, hurriedly. "Listen to me. Your father was shot last night on the river. You may as well know the truth now as later. He was the leader of the river gang. He was the man known as Captain Mack. Promise to keep your engagement and marry me and the world shall never know this; refuse, and I will tell all."

"It's false, you coward!" cried Nettie, trying to tear herself away, as Julius Fullham flung his arm about her. "Let me go!"

"Not until I have your promise!" cried Fullham, holding her back.

A footstep was heard upon the shell walk at that moment. Some one was coming in from the street.

"Help! Save me from this man!" screamed Nettie, as a well-dressed young fellow came bounding up the steps.

Biff! Bang!

Fullham got it between the eyes and measured his length on the floor.

"The boy went into Winn's. I saw him!" shouted a voice outside the gate.

There was a rush up the shell walk then, for a dozen men came bursting through the gate, and there was a bigger mob behind.

But before they could reach the door, Julius Fullham came flying out, falling all in a heap.

It had to be a big man that Dan Dean could not handle, and it was Dan and no one else who had so suddenly appeared on the scene.

He threw Fullham out of the house the instant the cowardly fellow regained his feet.

Then he slammed the door, turned the key and shot the bolt, turning upon the frightened girl the instant it was done, saying:

"Don't be afraid, Miss Winn. Try and calm yourself. I——"

"Oh, why did you come back again?" broke in Nettie. "How could you have changed your clothes in so short a time? Don't you hear them? Don't you know that I can do nothing to protect you now?"

"Why, I have not been here before!" cried Dan. "I saw your brave work by the square. I followed you. Where is that boy—my double? What have you done with him? Those fellows will never get him while I'm alive."

"He's not here."

"But he came this way. I saw him running. I could not follow him, so I followed you as soon as I could get free from the crowd."

"He has gone!" gasped Nettie, "and, oh, I wish you were gone, too. They'll take you for him and nothing can save you if you fall into their hands."

"We'll see about that," replied Dan, grimly, as a furious pounding on the outside of the door began.

"Open up here! Open up, Miss Winn!" shouted the mob. "We want that boy. We know you have got him inside."

CHAPTER XVI.

DAN BEFORE THE JUDGE.

The door fell in with a crash and the mob rushed into the house.

Dan, pushing Nettie behind him, boldly faced them.

There was something about his noble bearing and determined manner that held the mob back.

"Gentlemen, what do you want in this house?" he demanded. "Don't you see the lady? Respect her at least. As for me, I am ready to go with you, if you demand it. Step outside and I will follow you. There we will have it out like men."

"We want you," said the leader of the mob, a big, burly fellow connected with the Romer cotton press.

"Kill him! Shoot him!" cried Julius Fullham, pressing forward. "That's the boy. He threw me out! He's the one! He belongs to the river gang!"

"I threw you out because you insulted Miss Winn. I belong to no gang, and you know it very well."

"He speaks the truth, gentleman!" cried Nettie. "He is not the boy."

"I say he is!" roared Fullham. "Shoot him! Hang him to a tree!"

"You shut up. I'm running this business," retorted the cotton press man, pushing the redoubtable Julius to one side. "Say, boys, he's dressed like a nob. He can't be the feller. There must be some mistake."

"There certainly is a mistake," replied Dan. "I've just come down from New Orleans. I landed from the steamer which touched at the levee about half an hour ago. That can be proved."

"Here comes the sheriff!" shouted some one in the rear, and hurried footsteps were heard coming down the street.

This turned the tide.

Julius Fullham was very unpopular in Romer, while Nettie, as we have said before, was highly esteemed by all.

The mob turned Dan over to the sheriff and that was the end of the riot in Romer.

What became of Jack nobody knew but Nettie, and she held her tongue.

Of course she had no knowledge of what became of him after he rode away on the wheel.

"You'll have to go before Squire Fullham, young man," said the sheriff. "Of course if you can prove that you just came down from Orleans on the steamer that's enough, but there is no denying that you look just like the boy we captured and brought up from the bayous with the river gang."

"Send for Mr. Somers at the Gravier House," said Dan, quietly. "He was with me on the steamer. He can testify to the truth."

"What Somers is that?" asked the sheriff. "Not Lawyer Somers, of Orleans?"

"The same man."

"Oh, well, then that will settle it. Still I could swear you were the same feller. But I'll do the right thing. I'll send down to the hotel."

Despatching a man for Mr. Somers, the sheriff and those of his posse who were with him, now hurried Jack to the court house, where the other prisoners had all been safely landed, thanks to Nellie's appeal to the lynchers.

They all eyed Dan curiously as he was brought into the court.

Here was a difficulty that Dan had not thought of. Would these men tell the story of Jack's double, who had been in the holdout behind the palisade?

"If they do, I suppose I'm booked for jail," thought Dan, "but never mind. Mr. Somers will help me. I think I hold the winning cards."

Certainly Dan had made the most of his time while in New Orleans.

The plate taken from the church under the river had been sold to a dealer in old gold for a large sum. The gems proved to be genuine, and as Dan had the good fortune to deal with an honest man, he took away \$8,000 in hard cash when he gave up the treasure. Then there was Captain Mack's \$1,000. Altogether, the boy was pretty well fixed when he went to call on Mr. Somers, of Carondelet street.

What transpired at his interview with this well-known lawyer we pass over. For the present it is evident that Mr. Somers must have taken some interest in Dan's story, since he had come down the river with him to Romer.

It would have been better if he had remained with the boy, but having some business of his own in Romer, Mr. Somers left him to attend to it and then it was that Dan fell into the trouble already described.

Judge Fullham was an old, white-bearded gentleman of stately appearance, who cut a fine figure on the bench.

He had just finished examining one of the river gang when Dan entered the court room.

The sheriff walked straight up to the bench and held a whispered conversation with the judge, after which Dan's name was called.

As Dan approached the bench Judge Fullham gave a start and half rose from his seat, sinking back again with his face as pale as death.

"Who are you?" he demanded, hoarsely. "Sheriff, surely this is not the boy?"

"Well, it is, Your Honor," replied the sheriff, looking puzzled.

Judge Fullham seemed to control himself with some difficulty.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Dan Dean, sir."

"Are you a member of the river gang?"

"No, sir."

"Where do you live?"

"Down the river. I live with my adopted father, Mr. Hezekiah Handy, the planter. Perhaps you know him?"

"I've heard of him. Where are your parents?"

"I never knew my parents, Your Honor," he replied, looking the judge full in the eye. "I am an orphan so far as I know. Lawyer Somers, of New Orleans, can vouch for me. I expect him here every minute, and—"

"I shall have to hold you in \$2,000 bail, same as the rest," broke in the judge. "I understand there are two boys in the gang and that they strongly resemble each other. I've no doubt you are one of them, young man."

"I do not deny that I am one of them," spoke up Dan, seeing no use in further concealment. "Let me tell my story and you will see how the case stands."

"Not now. I'll examine into your case later."

"But—"

"No more talk. Sheriff, remove the prisoner."

"I protest!" exclaimed a gentleman, pushing his way to the front. "I represent this young man, Your Honor. We are prepared to furnish the required bail in cash."

"Cash bail cannot be accepted in this case, Mr. Somers," snapped the judge, looking over his spectacles.

"I take exception to Your Honor's ruling. The law admits cash bail in such cases. You have fixed the amount at \$2,000. The money is ready right now."

Then Mr. Somers went on to cite authorities and gave the judge a deal of legal talk which would not be interesting here.

He was manifestly right, and Judge Fullman knew it.

He also knew Lawyer Somers to be a man of wealth and position, so there was nothing for him to do but to yield.

"I'll see you later on this case," whispered the lawyer, leaning forward so as to catch the judge's private ear. "You haven't heard the last of it by a good deal."

Judge Fullham's face turned as white as his hair.

"What do you mean, Somers? Do you dare to threaten me?" he demanded.

"Oh, no! I never threaten," replied the lawyer. "You did well to give in and accept the bail, Your Honor. You'll hear from me later, I say. For the present, good day."

And with this Lawyer Somers, accompanied by Dan, walked triumphantly out of the court room, leaving the luckless prisoners staring after them, wondering what it was all about.

CHAPTER XVII.

DOWN THE RIVER ONCE MORE.

Never before had the court officials seen old Judge Fullham so disturbed.

They thought that it must be because the New Orleans lawyer had called him down and showed him his error, but

there was one person in the court who knew better and that was Julius Fullham, the bank cashier and the judge's son.

The court was immediately adjourned, the judge retiring to his private room, where Julius promptly joined him.

"What in the world is the matter with you, father?" he demanded. "You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I look the way I feel, then," replied the judge, hollowly.

"What do you mean? After what I told you I think you might have refused bail for that boy."

"It was too late when your note was handed up to me. Besides, I never dreamed that he had \$2,000 about him."

"It's the bank money. He's got it all—to that I'll swear."

"I doubt it. Still, if it can be proved to be so, then we have him. Listen, Julius, either that boy has got to be disposed of and the other one with him, or I am a ruined man and you need not expect to inherit one dollar of my estate."

"What!" cried Julius. "What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean just this. If resemblance goes for anything, that boy is your own cousin, my sister's son, and, with his twin brother, the true heir to all our wealth."

Julius stood aghast.

"It can't be! You are joking!" he cried.

"It's no joke, my son, as you may find out to your cost. Julius, I am an old man and I cannot do it—you must. Follow those two. Don't lose sight of them. Take help with you and see to it that the boy who calls himself Dan Dean never sets foot in Romer again."

"What do you mean?" demanded Julius, turning pale.

"Business—cold business!" replied his father. "Either you do it or I must. Dan Dean must be removed from our path and that lawyer with him, or there's trouble ahead for the Fullhams of the worst kind."

Leaving trouble brewing behind him, Dan hurried down to the hotel with Mr. Somers.

"Did you get it?" he asked, as soon as they were clear of the court house.

"Oh, yes," replied the lawyer; "no trouble at all about that, Dan. I've engaged the tug Sea Bird, Captain Jack Oliphant. It's a case of good pay and no questions asked. It's a lucky thing that we did it, too, for now that Judge Fullham has seen you I regard your danger as greater than ever. Chances are the son knew nothing, but if I know anything the old judge is not the man to give up without a fight. He will make the bank money an excuse to have you and your brother killed, and he will spare neither pains nor expense to accomplish his purpose. We are not ready to move; he is. Our only chance to head him off is to recover the bank money and plank it down in Romer and then boldly announce that you are the son of Catherine Fullham Bowner and the true heir to the fortune which the judge now enjoys."

"Do you really think it can be true?" demanded Dan.

"What did Judge Fullham think when he saw you? Wasn't he as pale as a ghost? Mark my words, there is no mistake. I only wish we had your double here with us now, Dan. I don't like his wandering about, for if the Fullhams lay hands on him his life isn't worth a cent."

"I must see Nettie Winn again and ask her more about him," said Dan. "Besides, I've got that letter to deliver to her. I had no chance to do it before."

"You must not go alone, then," said the lawyer, decidedly. "Let the letter rest until we are through our work."

"No," replied Dan. "It must be done now. I'm going and I am going alone. I'll join you at the levee in half an hour. Don't you be afraid about me."

Dan hurried away, leaving Mr. Somers to go down to the levee, where he went aboard the tug Sea Bird.

"All ready, captain?" he asked, as Captain Oliphant came out of the cabin to meet him.

"All ready, sir. We can start any time now."

"Got your provisions all laid in?"

"Yes, enough for a week's trip."

"And the men?"

"There is only the engineer and one colored deck hand; both are men that I know and are sworn to secrecy. You may depend upon its being all right."

Mr. Somers went into the cabin and shut himself up until Dan came aboard, which was in about twenty minutes.

"Well, did you see her? Did you deliver the letter?" he asked.

"I did."

"And with what result?"

"She was terribly overcome. It is a hard blow for the poor girl, sir. I feel sorry for her."

"I suppose, of course, you told her what we were going to do," said the lawyer, rather crossly.

Dan colored up.

"Well, I had to," he replied. "The letter made it necessary."

"What was in the letter?"

"Much the same as the last part of mine. It told where the treasures of the river gang are hidden. It advised her to join with Jack and take possession of them."

"Told her to keep the stolen cash and quit the country, I suppose?"

"It did, but she declares she will never do it."

"If she is anything like her father she will change her mind, then," said the lawyer. "I knew Simon Winn well, although I never once suspected that he was the same person as the notorious Captain Mack. I'm sorry you told her our plans, but I was prepared for it. We will say no more about it, Dan. If you are all ready the sooner we are off the better, for the next thing we know Judge Fullham will strike at us or, at least, he may get on to our scheme."

This was the signal for departure. Steam was all up and it only remained to pass the word to Captain Oliphant to send the Sea Bird flying down the river.

Captain Oliphant understood his business and they were soon rounding the low point of land which projects out into the Mississippi just below Romer.

Dan stood beside Mr. Somers on the forward deck discussing their future plans, when all at once they saw a small rowboat shoot out from the shore.

"Look! Look!" cried Dan. "Well, I declare!"

"What--where?" exclaimed Mr. Somers, looking around.

"Hello, a boat and a girl rowing! Dan, what does this mean?"

"It is Nettie Winn!" cried Dan. "I don't know what it means any more than you do, but see, she is signaling the tug."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SECRET CELLAR UNDER THE HUT.

"Do we let her come up with us, boss, or do you want to give her the shake?" asked Captain Oliphant, as the Sea Bird came across the line of the approaching boat.

"Let her come up. Stop!" replied Mr. Somers.

"We may as well find out what she wants," he said to Dan.

"You needn't look so disturbed."

Nettie pulled the boat alongside the tug, handling the oars with great skill.

"She's her father over again," muttered Mr. Somers. "Anything that girl undertakes she will carry out. Of that you can rest assured."

Nettie was dressed in a dark blue bicycle suit and on the seat in front of her a small traveling bag rested.

"Dan, may I go with you?" she called out as she drew near. "This matter concerns me as much as it does you. I have reasons for my request."

"I'm sure I've no objection," replied Dan, looking at Mr. Somers, who seemed rather annoyed.

"You had better come aboard, miss, and state your reasons," said the lawyer.

Dan threw Nettie a line and helped her aboard, making the boat fast astern.

"My reason is a good one, Mr. Somers," Nettie declared, as she joined the lawyer on the deck. "This money of which you are going in search is put in my charge by my father's last request. I should not be doing what was right if I did not go and if I don't go with you I shall pull down to the island alone in my boat."

"Which would be a very foolish and risky thing to do. May I ask what you expect to do with the money if you get it?"

"To see that it is restored to its rightful owners, as far as possible. Not one penny of it would I keep for myself, not for worlds."

"You had better go home and leave the business to us," replied the lawyer. "This is not a woman's work."

"It is my work and I am determined to do it," said Nettie, firmly. "Let me tell you something else. You will never be able to find the money without me."

Mr. Somers laughed.

"Oh, I think you are mistaken there," he said. "We understand our business. However, you can go if you wish. I have no objection. Show Miss Winn into the cabin, Dan. I suppose we shall have to make ourselves comfortable on deck now."

This was rather a sour welcome, but Nettie paid no attention to the lawyer's ill-natured remarks and Dan made up for it by his politeness later on.

In fact, it was remarkable how Dan had blossomed out into the gentleman, but good blood will tell every time.

Night was beginning to fall when the Sea Bird ran in among the bayous.

Dan looked across the river at his old home and wondered what Mr. Handy was doing just then.

"I'll do something handsome for the old man if I ever come into my fortune," he thought. "He wasn't so bad to me after all."

The tug shot in among the islands, Dan directing its course until at length they came to an anchorage not far from the concealed hut behind the palisade.

"We shall leave you here now, cap," said Mr. Somers. "In a little while we may want your help. Dan will come and call you when we do."

They went ashore and Dan silently led the way toward the palisade.

Nettie seemed much overcome. The discovery of her father's true character had affected the poor girl deeply. Mr. Somers felt for her and spoke a few comforting words to which she scarcely replied.

Reaching the palisade they found the gate open and the hut deserted.

"So this is the end of the famous river gang," chuckled Mr. Somers. "Dan, wouldn't the sheriff club himself if he could see us now?"

"We will wait till we get the money before we say anything," replied Dan. "Let me see what the letter says."

He took out Captain Mack's letter and looked over the last part, where his reading had been interrupted.

"Pull out the bottom bunk on the left," he read. "It moves like a drawer; you will find the secret stairway leading down into the cellar beneath it. That is the hiding place for our money. You will remember that no one but myself and Nick

were ever in the room when the cash was put away or taken out, and now you will understand the reason why."

"You will be disappointed," remarked Nettie, quietly. "You will be glad now that you brought me along."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Somers.

"Try it first. I will talk afterward," was the reply.

Dan seized hold of the bunk, which came steadily forward. He flashed a small dark lantern which he had brought with him in behind it.

"I suppose I may as well go the whole figure," said Dan. "Miss Nettie is determined not to tell us what she knows until it is done."

"I want you to satisfy yourself that you couldn't get along without my help," replied Nettie. "Go down and examine the cellar. Then come back and listen to me."

Flashing his lantern ahead, Dan ran down the secret stairs.

His footsteps died away in a moment and instead of hearing him moving about beneath the floor, as they expected, Mr. Somers and Nettie heard no sound at all.

"Dan! Hello, Dan. How is it, boy?" called Mr. Somers.

There was no answer.

"Something has happened!" exclaimed Nettie. "Oh, Mr. Somers, go down and see!"

"No! Stay where you are if you value your lives!" said a low voice behind them.

Mr. Somers wheeled round to face a boy who had just entered the hut.

"Dan!" he exclaimed, and then he saw that the boy was clothed in wretched rags.

"No! Not Dan. I'm his double," was the whispered reply. "I'm Jack! Oh, if I had only been a minute sooner! Did Dan go down in the cellar? If he did he is as good as dead!"

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE CELLAR.

Mr. Somers, the New Orleans lawyer, was not only an honest man, but also a very brave one, and one of the kind who is quick to act.

The instant he realized that danger had come to Dan by going into the cellar under the hut he jumped right in to help.

Lighting a small lamp which stood on the table he drew his revolver and started to crawl in under the bunks to get at the secret stairs.

"Hold on! As you value your life hold on!" cried Jack, forgetting his caution and speaking out loud. "Let me go. Old Caesar is a perfect fiend and as strong as ten men. He'll kill you sure."

"Who is old Caesar? Speak out, boy! Say what you mean!" cried the lawyer.

"He is our cook and guardian of the river pirates' treasure. A big nigger man seven feet tall, stout in proportion and half crazy at that. I saw him making for the hut and I came to warn you, but it seems I am too late."

"That don't faze me a bit!" cried the lawyer. "I'm going down in the cellar after Dan just the same."

"No, let me go!"

"Not much. I don't know you. I suppose you are Dan's double, as you say, but that makes you out a member of the river gang."

"And condemns me in your eyes, I suppose!" cried Jack, bitterly. "But I want you to understand that I love Dan as much as if he was my own brother——"

"Which he is, if I know anything!" broke in Mr. Somers. "Let go my arm, boy. Let me go!"

"If one of you don't go pretty quickly I'll go myself!" cried Nettie. "Think of Dan!"

That settled it in a hurry then, for both went, Jack in the lead with the lantern.

"It was only for your own sake that I interfered," he said. "Old Caesar hates me. He will mistake Dan for me like enough, that's why I am so afraid now."

"Hush! He will hear you," whispered the lawyer.

"No danger. He's as deaf as a post. I forgot that myself when I came into the hut whispering. Just as I feared. He is not here."

Jack flashed the lantern about the cellar.

It was entirely unoccupied.

A lot of boxes lay scattered about, but that was all.

"Bad business!" gasped Mr. Somers. "I don't like this."

"Isn't he here? Oh, isn't he here?" demanded Nettie, who had come downstairs behind them.

"Evidently not," replied Mr. Somers, "but don't let us waste time in idle talk. Of course there is some secret way out of this place. Young man, you must explain."

"Of course there is a secret way, but if I knew it wouldn't I have told you?" cried Jack. "No one knew that but Captain Mack and Nick and both are dead."

"Stop!" cried Nettie. "I know."

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Somers.

"Yes," said the girl, sadly. "Remember Captain Mack was my father. Perhaps you did not know about the letter Dan brought me, Mr. Somers——"

"I know all about it," broke in the lawyer. "Don't stare, boy; this young lady speaks the truth. She is the daughter of Captain Mack, whose real name you must understand was Winn. If any one can help us out she can. Speak, Miss Nettie. Tell us what you know."

"I ought to have spoken before," said Nettie. "Perhaps if I had this would not have happened. Here is the letter; read it for yourself, Mr. Somers. It will tell you all I know."

Mr. Somers seized the letter, and, holding up the lantern, proceeded to read it

Poor Jack, entirely mystified by all these strange developments, stood silently by, not knowing what to say:

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mr. Somers. "It seems that this cellar is only the doorway to the real hiding place of the treasure. Dan's letter was written some time ago—I noticed that. Then, no doubt, they used the cellar, but now—you should have told us before, Miss Nettie. It would have saved much trouble."

"I know it. I ought to have done so," replied Nettie, weeping. "You have read the letter, Mr. Somers. You see it is full of private matters. I did not want to show it—I thought I could better explain about the secret passage and the church under the river on the ground."

"The church under the river!" exclaimed Jack. "I know all about that."

"I know all you know, my boy," replied the lawyer, "for Dan has told me, but this letter tells a great deal more. How came you here ahead of us? That's what we want to know."

"Oh, that's easily told," replied Jack. "I rode the wheel to Van Buskirk's landing and there the down steamer happened to be wooding up. I got the captain to bring me down and when we were abreast the island I jumped overboard and swam ashore; then I came on here to the hut. It is my only home. I didn't know what else to do and I thought that perhaps Dan would come here and look for me, so I wanted to be on hand."

"Enough of this talk. We must look for Dan!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Evidently there is a way into this cellar from the outside, but the letter tells of a way out of it which I think I can find."

Mr. Somers then walked over to the board wall of the south side of the cellar and flashed the light against it.

"Yes, here is the secret spring, just as the letter says," he remarked, putting his finger on a small brass button set in the board. "Now, Jack, how well do you know old Caesar?"

"Oh, perfectly well. He hates me, though. I used to make fun of him, same as they all did. Captain Mack and Nick were the only ones he was really friendly with. He is more than half idiot and almost an animal, but Captain Mack could do anything with him. He always claimed that Caesar was as faithful to him as a dog."

"So much the worse for poor Dan, then. Do you think he will kill him?"

"I can't believe it. I knew Caesar could get in and out of the secret cellar whenever he chose—that's why I was so afraid. You can't tell what notion might take him. Be quick, Mr. Somers. We really ought not to delay a moment more."

"You are right. We have delayed too long already," cried the lawyer, pressing the secret spring.

There was a curious grinding sound and the board swung inward, disclosing a narrow passage leading off from the cellar.

It was boarded up on both sides and appeared to descend as it advanced.

Jack ran ahead with the lantern.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "This leads toward the sunken church. I think I begin to understand."

CHAPTER XX.

A PRISONER IN THE SUNKEN CHURCH.

We must now return to Dan, who was having anything but a pleasant time of it, as may well be imagined from the disclosures of the last chapter.

Trouble began the instant Dan took his foot off the lowest step of the cellar stairs.

A gigantic negro, with face horribly pitted with small-pox, suddenly sprang upon and dashed the lantern out of his hand; he then caught him by the throat and choked him into a state of unconsciousness, and all so suddenly that Dan did not have time to utter even one cry for help.

This was the way it started out.

The next Dan knew he came to his senses lying on a lot of old bags in a small room lighted by a greasy lantern, which hung suspended from the ceiling.

He started up and stared around, puzzled for a few moments to remember what had happened to him.

He was alone in the room and had plenty of time to look around for the next few moments.

"What does it all mean?" he gasped. "Where is that black giant who caught me? What place is this? Oh, I'm afraid I am in a bad fix."

His eyes were working while these mutterings escaped him.

The room was about twenty feet wide and some ten feet long; the ceiling was unusually high and the plastered walls green with mold. The whole place had a damp, unhealthy smell.

There was a window at each end of the room, but both were tightly boarded up. There were also two doors on the other sides, both securely fastened.

The floor was as damp as the walls and over in one corner, where it had settled, there was half an inch of water collected.

Ventilation seemed to come through a cement pipe which ran up through the ceiling—altogether it was as dismal a prison as can be imagined.

In one corner was a heap of bones which looked as though they had been gnawed by some animal. There was a dirty bed in one corner and ranged along the wall were a number of great wooden chests, with the lids carefully secured by padlocks. This was all, except for some cheap articles of furniture and a rusty stove, the pipe connected with which passed up through the ceiling alongside the ventilating pipe mentioned above.

Dan had just time to take in his strange surroundings when the door on his left suddenly opened and old Caesar came shambling into the room, a perfect giant—a fit subject for a dime museum. As it happened, Dan had never seen him during his stay at the hut, for at that time this strange guardian of the river pirates' treasure happened to be away.

"Well, well, well!" he chuckled. "Well, Mass'r Jack. Dis is a pretty how-to-do. Now de ole man's dead and de boys has done gone and got captured you must go and try to play de fine gem'n. Ho! Ho! You came back hyar to get the ole man's money, hey? No, siree! Caesar nebber gib up nutin'. Not a bit. He's de las' ob de gang to stick to de old place and mebbe de ole man's money don't b'long to him. Ho! Ho! I guess yes! Ho! Ho! Ho!"

There is no denying that Dan was pretty well scared.

"You are making a mistake," he said. "I'm not Jack. I'm his brother. Don't try to do me any harm. You must remember me. I'll take good care of you if you will only show me how to get back to the hut."

His words were entirely without effect. He didn't know how deaf the old negro was.

"Say, I sees you is a-talkin' to me, Mass'r Jack," chuckled the giant, showing his horrible yellow fangs. "Yo' orter know by dis time dat it hain't no sorter use, caze why. I couldn't hear if yo' was to fire a cannon right in dis yere place. Ha! Ha! Ha! Yo' will try to find de ole man's treasure, will yo'? Know whar yo' are now? No! Den I'll tell yo' You'se in de vestry ob de ole church under de ribber what sunk down wid de great earthquake years and years afore I was born. A church under a ribber! Whoever heard tell of sich a t'ing as dat? Hey, boy? Hey?"

It was no use to try to answer.

Dan shouted, roared, fairly bellowed, but all to no purpose; he could not make the slightest impression on old Caesar, who stood by indulging in that horrible chuckling laugh, talking on all the while.

"Yo' see, de boss he fixed up dis place only a few months ago," he added. "On dat side is de water, behind dat door. On dis side is a secret passage what de ole gulf pirates must hab dug out fifty years ago and more, caze why, de boss him diskivered it opening out of de cellar. De hut was deir work, too. It was ole when we came here. Say, dere's lots of secrets about dis yere place dat nobody knows but me, now dat de boss is dead. Yes, Mass'r Jack. Dat side ob de room behind de boards am all iron. I kin drowned dis place out in two minutes by opening dat do' what leads into de main body ob de church. Yes, and mo' dan dat, I can drown'd yo' and not let one speck of water stop into dis room. Oh, yes, I kin do all dat an' mo' dan dat. Looker yere, boy. See all de money. I'se de Lord High Treasurer Dat's what de boss uster call me. Ho! Ho! Ho! Jest looker yere."

Thus saying the black giant pulled a bunch of keys from his pocket and began unlocking the chests and throwing back the lids one by one.

Dan pressed forward to have a look, his eyes growing big with amazement as he peered into the chests.

One was half full of money, bills, silver and some gold. Another was packed full of various rare and expensive objects, jewelry, silver and gold plate, etc.

The rest contained clothing and goods of all sorts.

Here were the proceeds of many robberies by the river gang beyond all doubt.

Dan was looking at them curiously as old Caesar rattled on, when all at once the big black giant, with a yell like a demon, turned on him and clutched him by the throat.

"Ho! Ho! S'pose I divide with yo', Mass'r Jack," he yelled. "Yo' who hab always made plenty fun with de ole man? No! No! No! Neber! Youse gotter die. Here you go! Drowned in two minutes! Drowned in a church where you'se plumb suah to go straight up to hebben. Good-by! Hallelujah! Amen!"

Then, shouting wildly, old Caesar picked Dan up bodily, handling him as easily as if he had been a baby, and threw him head first against the wall.

Instantly a round panel, set working by means of a spring, flew inward and the water came pouring into the room in a stream as big round as a barrel.

But it was only for an instant.

Dan disappeared like a flash and the panel came back into place again with a loud snap, while the water ran off into one corner, passing out through a drain pipe constructed to receive it.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" chuckled old Caesar. "Dar's de las' one gone now. Nobody knows about de treasure but me. All mine. All mine. My goodness, what's dat?"

He could not hear the pounding which now suddenly started upon the door, but he could feel the jar imparted to the room and he jumped over to the door and put his hands upon it.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Heavy blows were being struck upon the door outside, but the wicked old darky could hear no sound.

"Dar's somebuddy a-trying to get into de treasury, suah," he muttered. "What kin it mean?"

CHAPTER XXI.

FULLHAM ON HAND AGAIN.

Dan was out in the main body of the church under the river, but he was in by no means such danger as old Caesar had supposed.

Dan had been there before and for that reason ought to know how to handle himself now, therefore we shall leave our hero in the sunken church for the present and return to Jack, Nettie and Mr. Somers, groping their way along the secret passage built years before by the old gulf pirates with enormous labor.

It was only recently that Captain Mack had discovered this place.

Jack's letter to Dan had been written many months before, Captain Mack intending that it should be found on him in case of his death.

It contained no mention whatever of the secret passage out of the cellar, for the very good reason that when he wrote it Captain Mack was not aware of its existence.

Nettie's letter, on the contrary, told how to enter the vestry of the sunken church and described the treasure room, but it made no mention of old Caesar, nor did it tell how to get out again. It had been hastily written at a time when Captain Mack was deeply under the influence of liquor.

Serious consequences were to arise from this omission, as will be presently seen.

"Where does this thing end, I wonder?" exclaimed Mr. Somers, after they had followed the secret passage for a considerable distance. "Are we never coming to the treasure room? Ha! What is this?"

They had come suddenly upon an old rusted iron door, which had been concealed around a turn in the passage and now completely blocked their path.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Somers. "This is the door mentioned in the letter. Let's see. Where was the secret button? I forgot."

"Down close to the floor," said Nettie. "A bit of brass, like the others—there it is."

"Sure enough," said the lawyer. He stooped down and pressed the button.

There was a sharp snap and the door moved slowly back an inch or so.

It did not act freely like the wooden door in the cellar.

The spring was old and badly rusted. Mr. Somers pushed the door open and held it back to allow Nettie to pass through.

"Come on, young man," he called to Jack, following Nettie, and, without thinking, letting go of the door.

Instantly the door flew back into place with a loud slam; there was a sharp snap and all was still, Jack being left in total darkness without such a thing as a match in his pocket.

"Confound it! What am I going to do now?" the boy muttered, and, stooping down, he tried to find the button, but there was no such good luck.

He could not find it. He could hear Mr. Somers calling behind the door, but the iron was thick and closely set and Jack was not able to distinguish what the lawyer said.

He pounded on the door and shouted.

The same muffled sound came in answer.

Mr. Somers was trying to make him hear, but it was no use, and the lawyer, realizing this after a little, said to Nettie:

"We must push on and attend to Dan. Jack is safe where he is, anyhow, but, as for ourselves, I don't know."

Mr. Somers was pretty well frightened by this time.

He had made the unpleasant discovery that he could not open the door on the inside and that the letter gave him no clew.

He kept this from Nettie, not wishing to worry her.

"Our only chance to get out of this is to capture that old darky," he thought. "Of course he knows the secret. The boy must take care of himself."

He pushed on, coming to a second iron door in a moment.

Here another difficulty arose. The letter made no mention of this door, which was the one which led into the vestry of the old church.

Mr. Somers reached for the secret spring in vain.

"We shall have to have help here," he said to Nettie, and he began pounding furiously on the door, which was the noise old Caesar felt rather than heard.

Meanwhile Jack, giving it up, determined to get back into the hut for matches.

He groped his way along the hall and had not gone far when suddenly his hand came in contact with a bolt and he was able to trace out another door set in the side wall, which neither he nor Mr. Somers had noticed as they came through.

Jack shot the bolt.

A faint light could be seen above him.

He groped his way up a flight of steps, passing through a wooden trapdoor set in the ground which stood open.

There was the hut right ahead of him among the canebrake.

"This is the way old Caesar got in!" thought Jack. "Strange I never saw this before."

He started for the hut on the run, and, just before he reached it the gate of the palisade was thrown open and several men came hurriedly out.

Julius Fullham, carrying a lantern, was in the lead and just behind him came Jack Turner and Sam Snyder, two of the prisoners of the river gang.

"There's the boy now!" shouted Fullham, flashing the lantern on Jack. "Catch him! Shoot him down! A hundred dollars to the man who does the job!"

CHAPTER XXII.

DAN AND HIS DOUBLE TAKE ANOTHER DIVE.

Three shots came whistling at Dan's double.

Julius Fullham was desperate.

Even his determination to force Nettle Winn to become his wife had given way before his father's commands and his anxiety to retain the rich plantation property which enabled father and son to live a life of comparative ease.

Jack would have been shot to a certainty if he had stayed there, but he did nothing of the sort.

Shrewd little fellow that he was and quick as a flash in all his movements, he took to his heels and ran, losing himself in the canebrake.

Fullham's rage was past all telling.

He raved, stamped, swore and went on at a dreadful rate.

"Follow him! Follow him!" he shouted. "I'll pay a thousand hard cash to the fellow who does up that boy. We are alone here in the swamp! Who will ever know?"

Jack heard what was said and heard them coming.

"By gracious, the fellow who earns that thousand dollars will have to catch me first," he muttered.

On he ran through the canebrake, closely pursued by all hands, for Fullham himself had joined in the chase.

Hard pressed, when he came out upon the bank of the bayou, close to where he and Dan had done their diving on the day when they explored the sunken church, Jack took a header into the water.

Fullham and his party heard the splash, but though they waited around the bank, they saw nothing more of the boy.

Of course we need not say that Jack was not drowned. It would have been pretty hard work to drown such a young water dog as he was.

As soon as he got under the bayou Jack struck down deeper.

A sudden freak had seized him.

"I'm going down into the old church," he determined, though

why he should come to any such determination at that time he was afterward never able to tell.

Down he went until he struck the steeple and then down still further until he was on the roof.

Of course it was not possible to see anything under the water, but Jack had been down so many times now that he did not need to see; he was perfectly able to do it all by feeling and he pushed on down to the roof, when all at once he was terribly startled by coming against the body of another swimmer, who struck him with considerable force.

They pulled away from each other instantly and both rose to the surface, coming up in a little cove where the canebrake grew thick, a short distance away from the place where Julius Fullham and his companions remained watching for Jack's return.

As it happened the heads of the two swimmers came out of the water together and there they were facing each other.

Dan!

Jack!

It is hard to tell which was the more astonished.

Dan and his double were face to face again.

"By thunder! Was it you, Jack? How you scared me!" exclaimed Dan.

Jack put his finger to his lips, motioning at the same time toward the shore.

Dan had no desire to talk. His breath was all gone and he was only too glad to follow Jack ashore.

Before they reached it, scrambling out on the muddy bank and crouching down among the canebrake, Dan knew what it all meant, for he had heard Julius Fullham's voice talking to the men.

"Strange what has become of the fellow!" he was saying. "Boys, we must find him. You don't know how anxious I am about it. I'll tell you now what I'll do. There's that bank money that you were going to put me onto. You shall divide it between you if you will catch those two boys and do them both up. Get down further on the shore and see if he hasn't come out there. Jake Turner, Snyder and I will stay here and watch. Mind you, now, the indictment against you two will be dropped and you can come and go about Romer and New Orleans just as you please. Think it over and get a move on you. It will make you both rich for life."

"And what will it do for you?" demanded Jake Turner.

Fullham made no answer and the man moved away.

"Jack," whispered Dan, "how in the world did you come here? Oh, I've got so much to tell you. Do you know who you really are?"

"Your twin brother," replied Jack. "Quiet now. I've got something to say, too, but we must take in this talk. Now is our chance and it may not come again."

Fullham and Sam Snyder moved a little nearer their place of concealment.

"Tell me, mister," said the latter. "What is it you are really after? I know the boss' secrets and Jake don't. I can take you into the old church under the river where the treasures of the gang are hid, but I must know what it's all about and whether I'm getting paid enough for my work. You offer a

blamed big reward, that's so, but then you must remember that the reward depends upon the size of the job."

"Kicking?" asked Fullham.

"No; I'm business, that's all. Out with it; tell me the truth. You know that our Captain Mack and Simon Winn, of Romer, are the same man. You told me that you overhauled Winn's desk in his daughter's absence and found a paper telling about the old church under the river and, in fact, all the rest of our secrets. Now be honest about it—did you find anything else?"

"I did," replied Fullham. "I see that I've got to trust you, Snyder. In the treasure room, which is the vestry of the old church under the river, is a certain paper which I must have."

"For why?"

"Because I am ruined for life if I don't get it."

"Just so. I seen the paper. Captain Mack showed it to me. It is an affidavit of a man named Carter whom your father paid to superintend the stealing of his twin nephews when they were kids. I know."

"You know too much," said Fullham, hoarsely. "Can you help me to get that paper?"

"I can for money."

"How much?"

"Five thousand dollars, besides my share of the bank boodle."

"It's robbery!"

"I'm dealing with a robber's son. Is it a go?"

"Yes; it must be so."

"Then let Jake Turner go to thunder. Follow me and I'll lead you to the treasure room."

They moved off among the canebrake.

"Jack!" whispered Dan. "Oh, Jack, did you hear all that?"

"Did I? I guess yes. We must act. Mr. Somers and Nettie have gone down into the treasure room. If old Caesar don't catch 'em these scoundrels will."

"Good heavens! Why didn't you say so before!" gasped Dan.

"Wish I had. No use to try to follow them two now. It's too late."

"Never too late! We must head them off. Nettie and Mr. Somers must be saved. We must get that paper. Jack, we can do it. We can get into the treasure room by way of the church. We can dive for it and I tell you we can do it if you are game to follow me"

"Gosh, I'm game for anything, Dan. Is it really true there's big money coming to us?"

"You bet."

"Then let's hurry."

A moment later and a splash was heard, instantly to be followed by another.

"What's that?" demanded Julius Fullham, suddenly coming to a halt.

"Only muskrats," replied Snyder. "Come on."

They moved on toward the palisade then.

But just the same it wasn't muskrats.

It was Dan and his double.

They also were on their way to the sunken church.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JUST IN THE NICK OF TIME

Could Dan actually get back into the vestry of the sunken church through the secret panel?

He thought he could.

Remember, there was no better swimmer on the lower Mississippi than this same Dan of ours.

He was good for fully three minutes under water every time.

A good deal can be done in three minutes. Dan had improved every instant of his time.

When old Caesar threw him through the panel, instead of striking right out to make his escape from the church, Dan held back.

He wanted to find out something about the working of that secret panel.

He found out just what he wanted to know and he proposed to use that information now.

And while Dan and his double are moving upon the treasure room by way of the water and Julius Fullham and Saw Snyder by way of the secret passage, let us return to the old vestry and see how it fared with Mr. Somers and Nettie, for with old Caesar on the other side of the iron door we left them in danger of their lives.

At least it would have been so with anybody less prompt to act than Mr. Somers.

The shrewd New Orleans lawyer would rather have died than allow himself to be downed by a "nigger."

When he heard the rattle on the other side of the second iron door he knew that he had old Caesar to deal with.

When the door flew back he was fully prepared.

"Drop, you black scoundrel! Drop or I'll drop you!" cried the lawyer, thrusting the revolver into the old darky's face.

Now if there was one thing above another that old Caesar did not like it was revolvers.

He gave a yell of terror, struck at Mr. Somers, knocked him back against the wall and then, when the shot went flying past his head, Caesar, with another yell, went flying back along the underground passage.

Slam! Bang! went the first iron door and there was no more Caesar to deal with, but Mr. Somers and Nettie still found themselves in almost as bad a fix as ever.

Mr. Somers made for the door as quick as he could jump.

It was too late.

The door was tight shut and he knew no more how to open it than he did before and old Caesar was not there to tell, for he had run right into the arms of Julius Fullham and Sam Snyder just as they were about to descend the steps leading down into the secret passage.

It was a fatal encounter for the crazy cook of the river gang.

Made wilder than ever by what had just occurred, Caesar attacked the two men furiously, drawing a long nicked knife on Snyder.

It sealed his fate, for Snyder whipped out a revolver, which he carried concealed about his person, and shot the old wretch dead.

Meanwhile, Mr. Somers, little dreaming that Judge Fullham's son was so close at hand, entered the treasure room with Nettie, for the second iron door did not work on a spring and now stood ajar.

"This is the place described in my father's letter," cried Nettie. "See, Mr. Somers, there are the chests, but where is Dan?"

"Heavens! I wish I knew!" answered the lawyer. "Can it be possible that we are actually in the sunken church under the river? Certainly it looks that way. Look how damp the place is. Here, Miss Nettie, we must examine these chests while there is time, for goodness knows what will happen to us next."

Mr. Somers threw up the lids, for Caesar had left them all unlocked.

Poor Nettie was a good deal overcome at the sight of their contents.

"Oh, only to think of it!" she moaned. "My father a thief! I cannot realize it! Oh, let us get out of this horrible place, Mr. Somers. It makes me sick to think of it all."

"I only wish we could get out," replied the lawyer. "Patience for a moment, Miss Nettie. I must find out what we have here."

Mr. Somers had passed by the money chest and the plate chest with a hasty glance.

The one which interested him most was a chest full of papers. These he was now tumbling over hastily, his amazement increasing with every move he made.

There were government bonds and shares of stock and private deeds relating to the affairs of many of the planters along the river.

Mr. Somers saw at once what it all meant.

These were the papers which came with the various robberies of the river gang.

They had a value, but could not be negotiated without running the risk of detection, and so had been tumbled in here.

"Oh, don't let us stay here. Let us try and get out!" exclaimed Nettie.

"Yes, yes, my dear," said the lawyer. "What's this? The missing deeds of the Beauvoir plantation? Well, I declare! Old St. Croix's stock in the Sixth National Bank of New Orleans! Bless my soul, I can hardly believe it! What's this? What's this? Papers relating to the stolen Fullham twins. Ah! ha! 'Ah! ha!'"

Bang! went the first iron door.

"Some one is coming!" cried Nettie.

"Hush!" breathed Mr. Somers.

He thrust the package of papers hastily into his pocket, and, pulling Nettie after him, stepped behind the second iron door.

"I don't know who it may be, but we will be ready for them, anyhow," he said. "If it is old Caesar returning I shall have to shoot him dead."

The footsteps drew nearer.

"There are two of them," breathed Nettie, and in an instant Julius Fullham, followed by Sam Snyder, passed through the second door, behind which Mr. Somers waited, revolver in hand.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

"Well, Sam! So this is the secret treasure house of the river gang?" remarked Fullham, staring around.

"That's what it is. We are in the old church under the river," replied Snyder. "I'm glad we didn't bring Jake down here, boss. There hain't no need to whack up with him at all that I can see. Let's you and me divide the bank boodle. There it is in the chest. What we took the time we made the raid and what we took from you in the swamp. It's all there, every cent."

Julius Fullham turned on him quickly.

"Can I trust you?" he asked. "Will you stand by me if I do?"

"Sure I will."

"I don't believe it. I—heavens! What is that?"

Suddenly there was a snapping sound and a stream of water came gushing into the room.

"The whole business has busted! Run for your life!" cried Snyder.

"No, no! The water has stopped. Where did it come from? How did it get in?" cried Fullham, staring around.

It was the boys.

Dan had almost opened the secret panel.

He made a miss of it, however, and they had to go back to the surface of the bayou for breath.

"Fullham's in there. I heard his voice!" gasped Dan, as soon as he was able to speak. "We must try it again, Jack."

It was their second attempt, as it was, the first being a total failure.

They waited only till their breath returned and then bravely dived into the bayou again.

Meanwhile Julius Fullham was searching among the papers in the chest for the very documents that the lawyer had in his pocket, as he stood with Nettie watching their movements behind the iron door.

It was a critical situation for Mr. Somers. He scarcely knew what to do.

He was as brave a man as there was in all Louisiana, but he had no desire to shoot Fullham, nor did he intend that they should leave without showing him the way out.

"It's useless; I cannot find the papers," said Fullham, after a moment. "How can we get these chests out without help?"

"We can't," replied Sam, "but we can return. First thing is to dispose of Jake and those fellows on our tug. Then we will be free to act."

"Do you mean to shoot 'em all?" demanded Fullham, horrified.

"I do."

"Nonsense."

"That settles it. I'll handle this business alone. Say your prayers, Julius Fullham, you are going to die!"

Drawing back, Sam Snyder suddenly pulled his revolver and fired.

"I'm shot! I'm shot!" gasped Fullham, throwing up his hands and falling to the floor.

Nettie screamed and Mr. Somers sprang out from behind the door and wrenched the revolver away from the astonished Snyder. In the struggle it dropped on the floor.

It came near costing Mr. Somers his life.

Snyder turned on him, caught him by the throat, and a fierce struggle followed.

"Oh, Nettie! Nettie! You have brought me to this!" groaned Fullham. "I'm dying and all through you."

Nettie never heeded, but sprang upon Snyder, attacking him from behind.

At that instant the same mysterious sound was heard again and a stream of water came shooting into the room, bearing with it the lithe form of Dan Dean, who fell on his hands and knees on the floor, closely followed by Jack, who shot clean over his head, landing just beyond.

Instantly the panel closed behind them and the water, which had nearly drowned Fullham, went rushing off into the corner, while Dan and his double sprang up and headed off Sam Snyder, who made a dash for the door.

"Dan! Jack! Why, boys, what in the world——" gasped Mr. Somers.

"We've got him!" cried Dan, as they pinned Snyder against the wall.

"Hold him! Hold him!" echoed Mr. Somers. "Without him we cannot escape."

"And we don't want to escape till we have found the papers he and that mean wretch on the floor came here to get," replied Dan. "Mr. Somers, I've got a lot to tell you. I——"

"You don't have to now," broke in the lawyer, picking up the revolver and covering Somers. "I've got the papers safe in my pocket and if they turn out what I suppose them to be they will make you and Jack millionaires."

* * * * *

The end had come.

Dan's fight for his rights were practically over, for it was all plain sailing after that.

This being the case, we propose to cut the remainder of our story short and to tell of what followed in a few brief words.

Snyder was a perfect coward and having once surrendered gave no trouble to Dan and his friends.

They tied his hands behind him and he showed Mr. Somers how to open the first iron door on the inside.

On the way out they discovered the dead body of old Caesar. Snyder did not deny the murder when Mr. Somers charged him with it. He set up a whine and begged for mercy.

Hurrying him up the steps, they took him to the tug, aroused the captain, and soon had all the help they needed to bring up Fullham and to carry the chests on board the Sea Bird.

On their way past the island they saw the tug in which Fullham had come down from Romer.

Apparently everybody was asleep.

During the rapid run back to Romer Julius Fullham, now entirely unconscious, hovered between life and death.

A just retribution had overtaken him for his villainy, but there was more still to come, for on reaching Romer the party was met by the startling intelligence that Judge Fullham had dropped dead of apoplexy at nine o'clock the evening before.

The excitement in Romer was most intense when Lawyer Somers told his story to the mayor and the money, bonds and other valuables were delivered over to the bank.

Then followed days of waiting, during which Julius Fullham passed the crisis and began to mend.

As soon as he was able to confer with his lawyer, he was met with the startling intelligence that Mr. Somers had put in a claim for his father's entire estate in the name of Daniel and John Bowner, twin sons of his late aunt, Catherine Fullham Bowner.

More days of waiting followed, and Julius left Romer for parts unknown.

Dan and his double were now in possession of property valued at over a million and Julius became a wanderer on the face of the earth.

Three years have passed since these events.

Dan is now a rich young planter and is married. His brother Jack lives with him on the old plantation, where Dan brought Nettie Winn a blushing bride.

The river gang is well nigh forgotten, but the sunken church is sometimes visited by venturesome divers.

A few valuable articles have been taken from it, but the boys left little behind them.

So the wheel of fortune brings changes to us all.

The Fullhams are forgotten and the two poor boys who have figured so prominently in our story are now the big men of Plaquemine Parish, and there are no more popular young fellows in all Louisiana than Dan and His Double.

Next week's issue will contain "GENERAL CROOK'S BOY SCOUT; OR, BEYOND THE SIERRA MADRES. By An Old Scout.

SEND POSTAL FOR OUR FREE CATALOGUE.

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THE MYSTERIOUS HUSBAND.

By Alexander Armstrong.

Mr. John Ellerton, late inspector of the criminal investigating department of Scotland Yard, sat gazing disconsolately into the embers of a dying fire toward the close of a gloomy November afternoon.

He had left the employ of the government to better himself, had opened an office and waited for clients. None had come, Mr. Ellerton's money was almost spent, and the outlook was a gloomy one.

He rose from his chair with a weary sigh, took his hat, and was just putting on his overcoat when there came a gentle knocking at the outer door.

"Come in," said Mr. Ellerton.

The door slowly opened, and a lady, deeply veiled, entered the room.

"I am afraid I am coming at an inconvenient time," said the lady, noticing the hat and overcoat, "but I wish to see Mr. Ellerton on a matter of business."

"I am Mr. Ellerton, madam," said the detective, motioning the lady to be seated and taking a chair himself. "I am at your service. You wish to see me on business? If I can serve you in any way I shall be delighted. Anything that you may say to me I shall, of course, treat as strictly confidential."

"Of course," replied the lady. "I have heard of your great talents, Mr. Ellerton, and I felt sure that I could rely upon your discretion or I should not have come to you. Let me state my business as briefly as possible."

"I am a married woman. I was married two years ago to a man whom I believed to be rich and a gentleman. I was a governess at a ladies' school at Folkestone at the time, and it was what you would call a runaway match."

"I met my husband often. I was tired of the life of insult and drudgery I was leading at the school. He offered to make me his wife. I consented. He went to London and wrote to me that all was ready. I went up one night, stayed at a hotel, met him the next day, and we were married at a church. After that we lived in a furnished house which my husband took. He must have been rich, for he gave me jewelry, dresses, all that I wanted, and had always plenty of money. But no one came to see us; we had no friends. When I asked my husband about his friends he said he had none; but sometimes he would go away for a week or a fortnight, and I thought that he had some friends somewhere, and did not like them to know that he was married."

"Pardon me one moment," interrupted the detective. "Was your husband in any profession—any business?"

"No; I should think not. He was always at home except when he went away, as I have told you. About twelve months ago he went away and took more luggage than usual. He said he should be back in a fortnight. He left me plenty of money to go on with. At the end of the fortnight I received a letter from him. It told me that his absence, owing to some family trouble, would have to be prolonged for some time and inclosed me a bank note for \$500."

"Go on, madam," said the detective, anxious to hear at what point his services were to come in.

"After that letter I heard no more for three months, and then came another inclosing a \$500 note, and telling me that my husband would probably be away a year, but that money would be sent me every three months. If I moved I was to advertise my new address."

"Good. I understand perfectly. Now what do you want me to do?"

"To find out for me where my husband is."

The detective thought the matter over to himself for a moment. Then he said: "I will do my best, but you must help me. In a matter of this sort you must keep nothing back. Now tell me, what is your own idea of the matter?"

"First tell me, having heard these facts, what is your idea?"

"I haven't seriously thought the matter over yet," replied the detective, "but at the first blush two solutions of the mystery occur to me. The first is that your husband has left you for somebody else; the second that this 'trouble' he speaks of is something which compels him to keep out of the way. Now tell me what is your own idea."

"I have an idea," replied the young wife, "but I shall not tell it to you, lest it should put you on the wrong scent. What I wish you to do is to take my case up. If you wish, I will bring you to-morrow the only photograph I have of my husband, a copy of my marriage certificate, and I will give you all the information I can. As to terms, I will be plain with you. I do not intend to have the rest of my life ruined, and to be the wife of a husband of whose whereabouts I am ignorant. Give me the means of annulling or dissolving this marriage and on the day that I am free you shall have a thousand pounds."

One morning about a fortnight after he had taken the affair up, the young lady called upon him in a state of great agitation.

"We have a clew!" she exclaimed. "We must follow it up quick. Can you leave with me for Havre to-night?"

"Why for Havre?"

"My husband is there. The gentleman who wants to marry me has seen him there. Look at this telegram."

The detective took the telegram and read it. It was as follows:

"Believe Morrison is here on board yacht with young English lady said to be his wife. Saw him being rowed from here to-day."

"Pray, come with me," urged the agitated lady. "It is most important that you should collect the evidence there. I could not. Name your own terms, but come."

That night Mr. Ellerton and Mrs. Morrison left Southampton by the Havre packet and arrived at their destination at nine on the following morning.

The "gentleman" was on the quay to meet them. Mrs. Morrison had telegraphed to him.

"They sailed this morning," he said.

The lady's face fell; so did the detective's.

"Oh, but we shall have them yet," said the gentleman. "I have ascertained where they have gone. I have my own yacht here. We can start this evening and make the run in twelve hours. We shall be anchored close by them to-

morrow morning, and by making some excuse or other, Mr. Ellerton can board your husband's yacht at once."

The detective looked at the lady for instructions.

"Oh, yes," she said, "certainly. Are you sure that we shall find them at this place?"

"Certain," replied the gentleman. "I have made friends with one of the sailors and obtained full information from him."

Making the appointment for seven that evening, the gentleman left them and Mrs. Morrison went to a hotel. In the evening, to the regret of the two men, Mrs. Morrison declared that she was unable to make the journey. She was quite knocked out, and was afraid she was going to be ill. What was to be done? To delay would be to lose the fugitives. Ultimately it was agreed that Mr. Ellerton and the gentleman should proceed alone. At the time appointed they were rowed out to a small yacht which was lying in the river.

Immediately the passengers were on board, the anchor was heaved, and the little vessel started on her voyage. The detective was conducted by the gentleman to a berth in the little cabin below, and, feeling sleepy, he turned in, and was soon in the land of dreams.

In telling the story of his adventure afterward, Mr. Ellerton could not say how long he slept. He remembered hearing a confused kind of conversation coming to him in his dreams, and presently, feeling something touch him, he opened his eyes.

He saw two men in the cabin, and one of them had a revolver in his hand.

At first he thought he was still dreaming, and then the reality came suddenly to him. He recognized the man with the revolver. Leaping up from his berth, he exclaimed:

"Ned Donovan!"

"Yes, Mr. Ellerton," he said, "it's me, right enough. You didn't expect to have the pleasure of my company, did you?"

He had been trapped. He was alone and defenseless on the high seas with a man who, two years ago, had sworn to be quits with him for "putting away" his pal.

"What are you going to do?" asked the detective, with an effort. "Murder me?"

"Oh, no," replied Donovan. "We're going to help you to escape. You're not comfortable here and you don't like the company, so we're going to let you out and walk away."

"Very well," said the detective, trying to appear calm.

"You're a cool hand, John Ellerton," replied the burglar, "and I admire you for it. But I swore that I'd settle you for what you did to Jack, and I've worked too hard to get the chance to give it away when it's come."

"Very well; then perhaps you'll tell me who Mrs. Morrison is, and who put her up to work the game so cleverly? I'm curious to know that."

"Delighted to give you the information, old fellow. Mrs. Morrison is Jack Frampton's wife,"

"The deuce she is! Then who is the young fellow I've been fooled into looking after?"

"That was her brother, my boy. After Jack was jugged she and her brother took a furnished house at

Kingston and some of our mob used it to stow things in that couldn't be put on the market."

"But the marriage? I saw the certificate—she married a man named Morrison."

"Bosh! We knew when we made up the plan for her to go to you that the first thing you'd ask to see was the marriage certificate, and that you might go to the church or to Somerset House to try and get a clew to the husband that way, and so we picked out the marriage of a cousin of hers for you, who married a man named Morrison. They live in the North. That's how Jack's wife came to take the name of Morrison when she went to Kingston. She couldn't call herself Frampton, for very good reasons, and so she borrowed her cousin's husband's name. We thought of all these things and made them fit, you bet, before we sent the girl to you. Now are you satisfied?"

"Quite," said the detective. "It was a capital plant, and it has been splendidly carried out. It has been so successful that I don't see why you should finish it up with a murder that won't do you the slightest good."

"It won't do me any harm, and I swore to Jack, when I got a message to him before his trial, that you should pay with your life for the trick you'd played him. You won't be the first man I've had to settle in the way of business, will he, Bill?"

The "gentleman," who during the previous conversation had sat an unobserved spectator, now spoke.

"No, Ned," he said, "nor the last, I dare say."

"Now, Mr. Ellerton," said Donovan, "if you're quite ready, come on deck."

"What am I to do on deck?"

"Nothing. Just step over the side of the boat and say good-by. If you want assistance we'll give it to you."

"You mean to throw me into the sea?" said the detective, setting his teeth and striving to hide his terror.

The detective cast one wild glance around the little cabin. Before him stood the man who had sworn to have his life, and that man armed. Here there were two to one. On deck there would be five to one, for Ellerton never doubted that the two sailors and the captain were part of the desperate gang into whose clutches he had been trapped by the beautiful wife of Jack Frampton.

Suddenly there was a fearful crash, the sound of men rushing to and fro upstairs, and then the water began to pour into the cabin.

With a fierce cry Ned Donovan burst open the cabin door and made a rush for the deck. Ellerton followed him. He saw a great black hull looming out of the water, he felt the vessel on which he stood shiver and tremble, and then with one convulsive pitch it went down under the black waters of the sea.

When Ellerton opened his eyes again he was lying wrapped in blankets in a cabin, and a gentleman in the uniform of a ship's doctor was standing by him.

"How did it happen?" gasped the detective.

"We ran you down. It was your people's fault—they carried no lights."

"Where are the others?"

"There are no others. You were the only one that came to the surface again. We waited about till there was no hope, but you were the only man saved."

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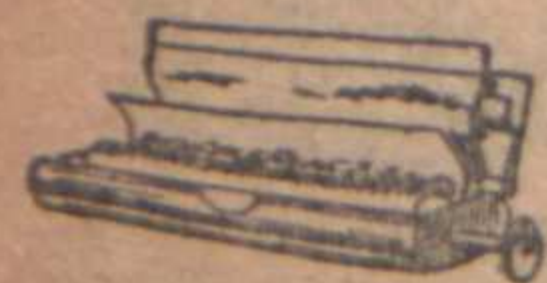


With this trick you borrow a hat, and apparently shove a card up through the crown, without injuring the card or hat. The operation can be reversed, the performer seemingly pushing the card down through the crown into the hat again. It is a trick which will puzzle

and interest the closest observer and detection is almost impossible. It is so simple that a child can learn how to perform it in a few minutes.

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THE PRINCESS OF YOGI CARD TRICK.

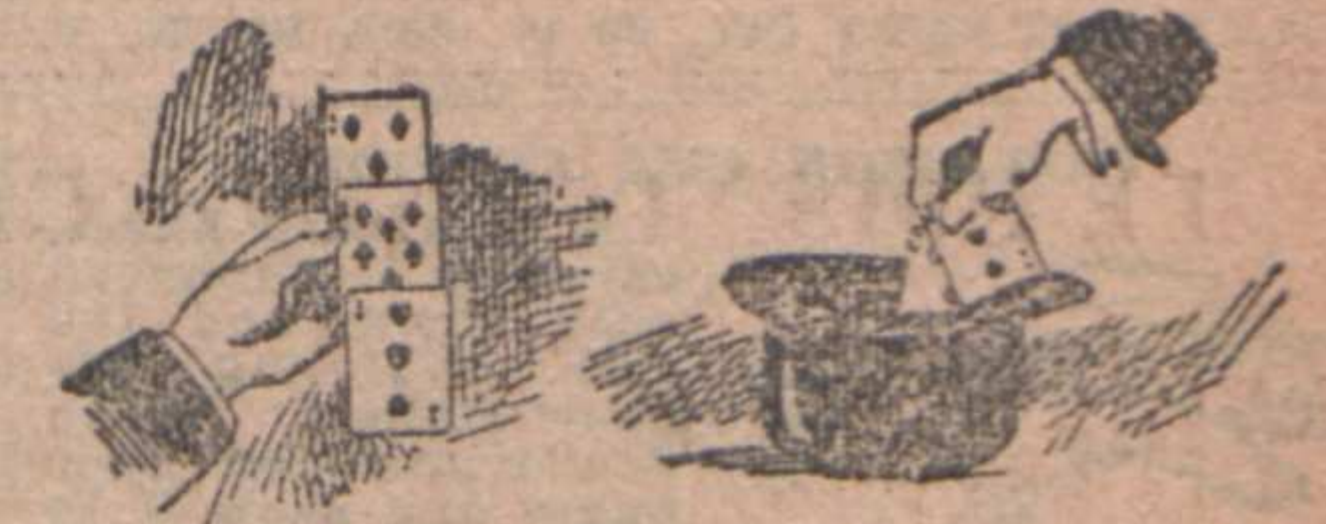
Four cards are held in the form of a fan and a spectator is requested to mentally select one of the four. The cards are now shuffled and one is openly taken away and placed in his pocket. The performer remarks that he has taken the card mentally selected by the spectator. The three cards are now displayed and the selected card is found to be missing. Reaching in his pocket the performer removes and exhibits the chosen card. Price, 15c.

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JUMPING CARD.—A pretty little trick, easy to perform. Effect: A selected card returned to the deck jumps high into the air at the performer's command. Pack is held in one hand. Price of apparatus, with enough cards to perform the trick, 10c.



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THE DEVIL'S CARD TRICK.—From three cards held in the hand anyone is asked to mentally select one. All three cards are placed in a hat and the performer removes first the two that the audience did not select and passing the hat to them their card has mysteriously vanished. A great climax; highly recommended. Price, 10c.

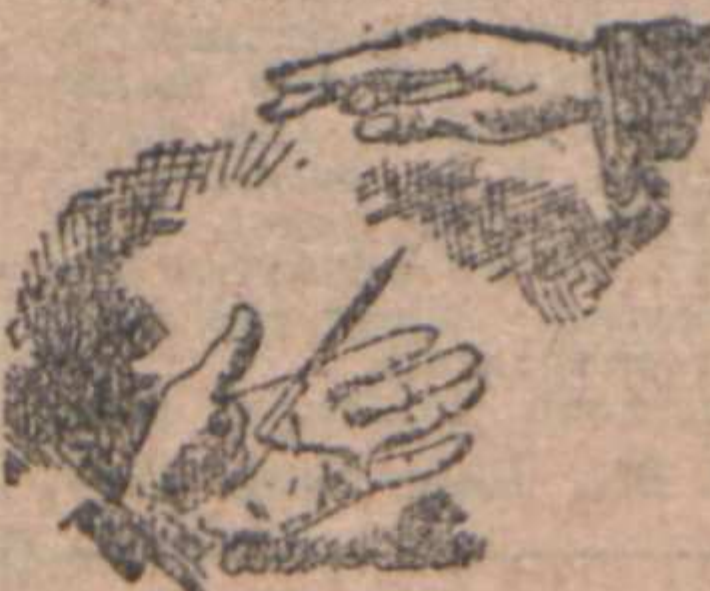
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—The performer exhibits an ordinary pencil and shows it top and bottom. The pencil is laid on the palm, the performer calling attention to his hypnotic power over innate objects. The pencil is seen slowly to rise, following the movements of the other hand. The witnesses are asked to pass their hand around it to assure themselves no thread or hair is used. Price, 25c.

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"KNOCK-OUT" CARD TRICK.—Five cards are shown, front and back, and there are no two cards alike. You place some of them in a handkerchief and ask any person to hold them by the corners in full view of the audience. You now take the remaining cards and request anyone to name any card shown. This done, you repeat the name of the card and state that you will cause it to invisibly leave your hand and pass into the handkerchief, where it will be found among the other cards. At the word "Go!" you show that the chosen card has vanished, leaving absolutely only two cards. The handkerchief is unfolded by any person, and in it is found the identical card. Price, 10c.

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THE MULTIPLYING CORKS.—A small round box is shown to be empty and one of the spectators is allowed to place three corks in it. The cover is put on and the box is handed to one of the spectators, who, upon removing the cover, finds six corks in the box. Three of the corks are now made to vanish as mysteriously as they came. Very deceptive. Price, 15c.

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NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 19, 1913.

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

Six Chinese, hidden in a canalboat loaded with pulp wood, were found recently at Rouse's Point, N. Y., by immigration and customs inspectors. All were arrested, together with the captain of the boat, Otto Petersen, who is charged with smuggling Chinese into this country.

Jenny Lind hated the Americans. She abhorred the very name of Barnum, who, she said, "exhibited me just as he did the big giant or any other of his monstrosities." "But," said I, "you must not forget how you were idolized and appreciated in America. Even as a child I can remember how they worshipped Jenny Lind." "Worshipped or not," she answered sharply, "I was nothing more than a show in a showman's hands. I can never forget that."—From "The Courts of Memory," by Mme. Lindenerone.

Chief White Eagle of the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota has deserted his pony for an automobile. In February White Eagle sold two large silver treaty medals presented to his forefathers by General Jackson. He had an idea that an automobile would just about suit him, so he invested his money in a car. According to reports from the reservation White Eagle is having all kinds of fun dashing across the prairie with the tonneau filled with companions who constantly indulge in the warwhoop. There is no traffic to bother the chief, and the absence of speed laws in his vicinity makes racing speed possible.

A remarkable catch of big fish in Chesapeake Bay is reported by the officers of the Norwegian steamer Tancred. The steamer was on her way up the bay and came to anchor off Sandy Point over night. Next morning when her anchor was being raised the mate, who was watching the cable come in, saw something wriggling in the water. The entire chain was hoisted a little further and it was seen that a big fish had been caught in one of the links. A man was sent over the side, and when he came back he had a fine Chesapeake Bay mackerel weighing over five pounds. The fish was dressed and served for the cabin dinner. It is supposed that the fish in chasing prey ran into the link of the chain and wedged itself so tightly that it could not get loose.

Though the petrel is swift, the frigate bird is far fleet. Seamen generally believe that the frigate bird can start at daybreak with the trade winds from the coast of Africa and roost the same night upon the American shore. This, however, is doubted by a good many people who have looked into the matter, and who say that, although the frigate bird is incomparably swift in its flight, it probably cannot attain the speed of 200 miles an hour that has been ascribed to it. The frigate bird's wonderful speed is due to the extreme length of its wings, which are also unusually strong. But the frigate bird, in addition to being able to fly so rapidly, is a mighty good fighter, too. It lives on fish that it takes from other birds by force. Combined with its speed, this makes it a very undesirable neighbor in birdland. The unlucky gulls and terns it robs have very little chance against it, as if they take to flight, the frigate bird can pursue and overtake them, and if they make a stand and fight, they can hardly hope for success against the hardy creature.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

It was at the dinner-table and the hostess addressed her husband's brother: "Do have another piece of pie, William." "Why, really, I've already had two; but it's so good I believe I will have another." "Ha, ha!—mother's a winner!" said little Frank, excitedly. "She said she'd bet you'd make a pig of yourself."

The Pullman porter stood before the traveling man in an expectant attitude. "Well, George," said the traveler, "can I give you anything?" "Whatever your generosity permits, sir," answered the porter. "Well, boys," replied the traveler, turning to his companions and winking, "let's give the porter three cheers."

A celebrated lawyer once tried to get a Boston witness to give his ideas of absent-mindedness. "Well," said the witness, who was a typical New England Yankee, "I should say that a man who thought he'd left his watch to hum, and took it out'n his pocket to see if he'd time to go hum and get it, was a leetle inclined to be absent minded."

Harold had just interviewed his prospective father-in-law, and his musings were brought to an abrupt ending when his fiancée suddenly came into the room. "I hope you were polite to father, dear." "Indeed I was. I treated him as if he were a king." "You never called him 'Your Majesty?'" "No-o; but I backed out of his presence."

Johnny had been doing his home work quietly and felt sure that his lessons would be perfect without having to ask the aid of his father, until all of a sudden he said: "This gets me, dad." "What is the trouble now, son?" asked the father. "Why, the teacher wants me to give a definition of the word 'non-essential.'" "That's easy, son," replied the father. "Just give it as the letter p in pneumonia."

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